



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 82.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S WATER TRAIL

OR
FOILING THE MEXICAN BANDIT



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

BUFFALO BILL AND SURGEON POWELL, HELD BY THE LARIATS, SWAYED THEIR HORSES TOWARD THE CAVERN-LIKE CREVICE IN THE BANK.



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BUFFALO BILL'S WATER TRAIL:

Foiling the Mexican Bandit.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER.

A daring robbery of a stage-coach had been committed upon the Northern Overland trail, in which a fair passenger had been the greatest sufferer.

Tommy Todd had been driving his regular run along the Overland trail, with no thought of danger, although robberies were frequently committed by an outlaw band known as the Toll-Takers, when suddenly he had been brought to a halt by a ringing command from some unseen person on the roadside.

Tom Todd was a fearless man and an expert driver, and he took the chances of losing his own life in an effort to dash through.

But he soon saw that escape was useless, as not one or two outlaws, but eight appeared in sight, all mounted well, armed to the teeth and masked.

"Don't play any funny business with me, Tommy Todd, if you have any value for your life," cried a

stern voice as he covered the driver with his revolver and rode up to the coach.

"No, I guesses as how I won't, fer I really doesn't feel funny," was the cool reply, and Tom Todd accepted the situation without another word.

The odds were against him; the Toll-Takers had revived and he was in for it.

"Who have you inside, Tommy?" asked the leader.

"Waal, thar be two miners, a pretty gal, and a sutler from Rock Port."

"The miners and the sutler ought to be pretty good picking, while I guess the girl is only a soldier's sweetheart, and therefore poor as an empty haversack."

"That's so about the pretty gal, but the miners is dead bu'sted and the sutler has got so leetle dust with him I hed ter credit him with his ride."

"I'll see for myself," muttered the leader, and he called to one of his men to dismount and throw open the coach-door.

"Now out of there, all of you!"

The first one to obey was a miner, rough-looking, but honest-faced and a trifle pale.

"Well, old Pick-ax, hand over your dust!" was the command.

"I've got but little."

"I want that little, pard, so lose no time."

The miner unbuckled a buckskin belt and threw it upon the ground.

"You have more."

"That is all."

"I say no; but after a while I'll talk to you."

"Next!"

The second one to dismount from the coach was another miner, and he, too, was forced to surrender his belt of gold-dust.

"Next!"

The sutler, a smooth-faced man with a cunning look out of his eyes, got out next.

"Your money I want, my friend."

"I have nothing, for I am going East to buy goods, and sent my money ahead weeks ago."

"You feared being robbed?"

"Yes."

"You have no money with you?"

"None."

"You are sure?"

"So sure that I had to get Todd to credit me for my ride until I returned."

"Well, I will keep you a prisoner until you send for your money, that is all."

"Next!"

The sutler winced at this, while, in response to the command of the outlaw, a beautiful face peered from the coach and a soft voice asked reproachfully:

"Would you rob a poor girl, sir?"

"Well, yes, when I need money. Robbery is my trade, and I must work it for all it is worth. What have you with you, miss, of value?"

"A little jewelry of trifling value, and my purse containing seventy dollars," was the answer.

"Hand me your satchel, please."

"On, sir!"

"I must be obeyed," came the stern reminder.

The young girl handed over her leather traveling satchel, and opening it the outlaw began to coolly look over its contents.

At last he took up a letter, and, opening it, read it carefully through.

"Aha!" he said, as though he had made a discovery.

Then he took a loaf of bread from the satchel, and said:

"I think I shall take this for lunch."

"Oh, sir!" and the girl pleaded earnestly, until Tom Todd cursed the outlaws for a lot of murdering thieves.

Breaking open the loaf, with a smile the outlaw revealed the fact that the loaf had been hollowed out

and in it was a case of jewels, a purse filled with gold, and several rolls of bank bills.

The maiden buried her face in her hands and began to sob, but the hardened wretch coolly pocketed the riches, and, turning to the sutler, said, sternly:

"Now, sir, pay your toll, or you go into irons and imprisonment until you can do so!"

The sutler vowed, swore, but all to no avail, and at last ripped open his bootleg and handed over the money he had sewn up there.

The miners also managed to find more money than was in their belts, and all were then told to get back into the coach, while Tom Todd, vowing vengeance, drove on.

For the men he did not care; but for the young girl he felt most keenly.

"It will be long weeks before I can get more money, and what am I to do meanwhile?" said the young girl, who had accepted a seat on the box with Tom Todd after leaving the scene of the robbery.

"You say your father is an army officer, miss?"

"My father is dead, sir; but he was an army officer, a captain."

"Waal, you kin git more money, miss, I guess?"

"Yes, by writing to friends for it; but it will take weeks."

"Waal, miss, when I gits to the end o' my run, I'll jist ride over with you to Fort Grand, whar they will be glad to entertain yer, I knows, until yer hears from home."

"Yer might stay at the station, but thar is only men thar, and the fort would be pleasantest, for thar is ladies thar, and lots o' handsome young officers who'll git gone on yer pretty face."

"I'll take yer to ther fort, and thar yer'll be welcome."

And Tom Todd was as good as his word, and Belle Braddock did indeed find a warm welcome at Fort Grand, where she at once became the guest of Heloise Hembold, whose beauty had won for her the name of the "Pearl of the Prairie."

CHAPTER II.

THE BEAUTIFUL KIDNAPER.

The reception which Belle Braddock met with at Fort Grand was enough to make her heart glad.

Tom Todd rode up with her from the Overland station, and leading a pack horse carrying her luggage.

In a few words he told her story, and at once, from the colonel down, she received only the warmest welcome.

Heloise Hembold, the major's daughter, at once invited her to become the guest of her father and herself in their comfortable quarters, and Belle soon found herself in a most comfortable room, where she could remain as long as it was her pleasure to do so.

Heloise Hembold was the belle of the border forts,

and certainly she was a most beautiful maiden, while one and all loved her for her noble nature, as well as her beauty of face and form.

With large, lustrous black eyes, fringed by sweeping lashes, hair of a rich auburn hue, and a form the perfection of symmetry, she yet seemed unconscious of her loveliness.

Heloise was a heroine, too, as this romance will show, and it was whispered about that she was an heiress to a large fortune.

Major Hembold, a man in not very robust health, idolized his daughter, and dreaded the day when he would have to give her up to some gallant claimant for her heart and hand.

The major had known Captain Braddock in earlier days, and was delighted to welcome his daughter to his home, especially as she was in distress.

"Braddock was a wild fellow, but married a lady in California, and settled down there, I heard, as also that he left his daughter rich.

"She is certainly a beautiful girl," said Major Hembold to his daughter, the day of Belle's arrival.

"She is indeed beautiful, father," was the response.

Nor was their praise of Belle Braddock's beauty exaggerated, for their fair traveler was indeed lovely in the extreme.

Her face won at a glance, and her manners were fascinating in the extreme.

Scarcely twenty she seemed, and yet she was an accomplished musician, and soon revealed that she possessed a number of other accomplishments.

She had wagered a kiss with a dozen young officers, against a box of bon-bons, and other things, that she could beat them shooting with rifle or revolver, and she had not a single wager to pay.

She proved herself a fair hand with the sword, rode superbly, threw a lasso with the skill of a Mexican, and, in fact, was an expert in border ways and sports.

She had not been a week at Fort Grand when the affection of the young officers was about equally divided between the fair stranger and Heloise Hembold.

But such a thing as "envy, hatred or malice" never entered the heart of Heloise against her lovely rival, whom she was really glad to see win favor with all.

Thus the two girls, so strangely thrown together, became fast friends in a very short while, and with all of her enjoyment of the society of the young officers, Belle Braddock seemed to really care to be more with Heloise than the lieutenants, whom she had infatuated.

Often she would propose to slip off for a walk or a ride together, with no male attendants, and though warned of the danger of doing so, she would toss her pretty head and reply that there was no danger in their going alone, other than was imagined by those not invited to accompany them.

Heloise was herself a perfect frontier girl, and she knew the surroundings of Fort Grand as well as did

any officer, and just what danger to expect and how to avoid it, so that her father was not anxious as to her going, so long as she did not venture too far away.

Her horse was the fleetest at the fort, with the only exception of the animal which Belle Braddock had been given to ride by Captain Alfred Taylor, a dashing, handsome young cavalryman, and who felt glad to allow the beautiful girl the use of his favorite steed.

One day when the officers were all called out on duty, Belle Braddock ran into the room where Heloise sat and cried:

"Come, Heloise, all of the shoulder-straps are engaged now, so let us slip off for a ride on the prairie.

"We will take a lunch along and have a jolly picnic of it all by ourselves."

"I will gladly go, Belle," responded Heloise, and she at once began to get ready.

The horses were brought up to the rear of their quarters, and Belle came out with a saddle-hamper well-filled, and two heavy serapes had been strapped to the rear of their saddles.

Mounting, they told the orderly to let them out of the side-gate of the stockade, and away they went at a dash down the hill upon which the fort was situated.

"We must hurry, Heloise, or some of those shoulder-straps will see us and be upon our trail. How I hate to have men always around," said Belle, with a laugh.

"I rather like to have the handsome fellows about," responded Heloise archly, but she added:

"Still I enjoy a ride alone with you immensely, Belle, for you are such good company."

"Thank you; but what do you say to a dash down the river and a chance at an antelope, for I would like to carry one a piece back with no aid from the officers?"

"The very thing, Belle."

And away they sped into the timber that fringed the river.

At last Heloise said that they were going too far and must return to the fort.

"Nonsense, Heloise; we are not half a dozen miles away yet."

"Yes, we are; and we must return."

"Go to the ford with me, and I'll return with you then."

So Heloise continued on until the ford was reached, and there she halted.

"Belle, you do not realize the danger of our coming so far, so let us hurry back to the fort."

For reply Belle Braddock bent over, and, seizing the bridle-rein of Heloise with one hand, with the other she drew her revolver from the saddle-holster and said, sternly:

"I have played my card well, Heloise Hembold, and you are my prisoner!"

Belle Braddock was a decoy.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST TRAIL.

Belle Braddock had been correct in her surmise that, if seen by the officers of the fort going off alone, they would be followed.

For doing so uninvited, the young officers would have the excuse that they feared to have them go alone, so followed as an escort.

When their duties were over, several went over to Major Hembold's quarters to visit the maidens, and learned that they had gone off for a ride.

"Who with, orderly?" asked Lieutenant Emory Ames, who had several times averred in confidence that he did not know which of the two girls he liked the best.

"Alone, sir?"

"How long ago, orderly?"

"Over an hour, sir."

"Then I shall go in search of them. What do you say, Vincent?"

"With pleasure," was the response of Lieutenant Victor Vincent; and, fifteen minutes after, the two officers, well mounted, were following the trail which the major's orderly had said the ladies had taken.

They at once struck the trail of the two horses and pursued it easily for miles.

"They were riding rapidly all the way, Ames."

"Yes, and a precious pair of foolish girls they are, Vincent."

"I should think the fair Heloise had had a lesson which would deter her from going so far away from the fort."

"A woman never learns by experience, Ames, though a man will," was the sage rejoinder.

"Where can they be going?" asked Ames.

"*Quien sabe?*" responded Vincent, with a shrug of the shoulders.

At last they reached the ford, and Ames again remarked:

"Foolish girls! See! they have crossed the river, and it is a good fifteen-mile ride around to the other ford above the fort!"

"Can they have taken it?"

"Yes, for what else can they have done?"

"Shall we follow?"

"No, for it would be useless, as they would reach the fort before us. Let us ride back rapidly and beat them there."

"All right, and say nothing of this pursuit."

"Yes," and away they went rapidly back upon the trail.

It was nearly sunset when they came up to the stockade gate.

"Have Miss Hembold and Miss Braddock ridden in yet, sentinel?" asked Ames.

"No, sir."

Arriving at their quarters they found considerable

alarm existing at the continued absence of the two ladies.

As they were not in sight, and the upper ford could be seen from the fort, several young officers were preparing to go in search of them when they heard the report of Ames and Vincent.

A party accordingly started by the upper ford, while Lieutenant Ames and several others went back the way they had come, for Buffalo Bill, who had recently been detailed to serve at Fort Grand in order to put down the outlawry in the vicinity, had come in and reported seeing suspicious trails on the other side of the river.

The two parties met a couple of hours after dark fifteen miles from the fort, and nothing had been seen, by either, of the missing women.

So there was nothing to do but return and hope that they would find them there.

But in this hope they were doomed to disappointment, as they had not arrived.

At once all was excitement, and Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, guiding Captain Taylor's troop, started for the ford where the two lieutenants had last seen the trail of the two horses ridden by the girls.

Major Hembold was in deep distress and had been urged not to go, Captain Alfred Taylor telling him that he would bring back the runaways if they were to be found.

Lieutenant Ames was an officer of the troop, so went along, stating that he felt no fatigue.

It was a couple of hours to dawn when the cavalry reached the ford, and as nothing could be done until daylight, they went into camp on the river-bank.

Just as the eastern horizon grew gray Buffalo Bill awakened, and, ten minutes after, he and Texas Jack were searching for the trail where Lieutenant Ames had seen it last.

The troopers had their breakfast and were in their saddles before sunrise, so that the scouts set off upon the trail.

Buffalo Bill felt that he was upon his mettle to find the maidens, and so stood at the head of the command, Texas Jack near him, and their two well-trained horses not far off waiting to follow their masters.

Then, with the eye of an expert, Buffalo Bill read the "signs" which Texas Jack alone of all the rest could also see.

"They halted here, and their horses must have refused to take the ford, as the tracks are scattered about, thick and deep."

"Strange, Cody, for my horse, which Miss Braddock rode, never balked at water before," Captain Taylor declared.

"Then, something is amiss here, that is certain, and here they entered the stream."

Crossing over, the trail was struck upon the other shore and followed.

"It branches off here to the left, down the river, Captain Taylor, instead of up toward the ford above the fort."

"Yes, and they were riding rapidly, and side by side."

"Miss Hembold certainly knew the danger of this course, down the river," Ames remarked.

"Yes, but she has taken the trail in spite of its danger," Captain Taylor responded.

On went the scouts, now side by side, on foot, and their eyes upon the ground reading every sign.

Behind them followed their horses; then came Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Ames, their two-score troopers following.

For a couple of miles the scouts led the way, keeping the trail unerringly. Then it bore again toward the river bank.

"Cody?"

"Yes, Captain Taylor."

"The other ford is not far away."

"A mile only, sir."

"If they recrossed the river there, then they had the prairie upon one side back to the fort and the swamp on the other?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had they taken the prairie they could have reached the fort by nightfall?"

"Yes, sir, if——"

"If what, Cody?"

"If there was nothing to prevent them."

"Ah, I understand. You believe that they have been captured?"

"Something has gone wrong with them, sir, for word was to be sent after us if they reached the fort after we left."

"Yes, and no word has come."

"None, sir," and Buffalo Bill pressed forward on the trail once more.

It led them at last to another ford, half a mile below the one crossed by the two girls.

The tracks of their horses were seen there, going into the river, but upon the other side there was no trace or sign to indicate where they had come out of the water.

Two days before there had been a rain, and the only tracks on the other shore were those of a bear and deer.

Nor was there a back track to show that they had retraced their way.

"The trail is lost, Cody, and here in this stream."

"Yes, Captain Taylor, the trail is lost," responded Buffalo Bill, dispiritedly.

It was evident that both he and Texas Jack were bewildered by the discovery they had made there at the ford.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SURGEON SCOUT ARRIVES.

The scouts being at fault, Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Ames grew very anxious and uneasy.

They knew that Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack read signs on the plains as scholars did a foreign book, and when they admitted that the trail was lost, there was indeed cause for anxiety.

For a long time Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack sat in their saddles, their horses now standing up to their girths in the river.

At that point was a shoal where the river could be crossed without much danger of a ducking, but above, as far as the eye could reach, the river was deep and the stream was flowing swiftly.

In the other direction, to a bend half a mile below, the river flowed on as rapidly, and it was deep enough to swim a horse at any point within view.

Still the tracks of the two horses ridden by Heloise and Belle had not entered the river there at the ford and had not gone across to the other shore; nor had they gone back again the way they had come.

The soldiers had halted upon the bank, and their officers were at the water's edge.

The scouts were in the stream, and the tracks they trailed were plainly visible leading into the river, but not out again.

The imprints had not been in the least obliterated, and there was no mistaking the clean-cut, iron-shod hoofmarks of Captain Taylor's splendid mare, Black Cloud, or Lady Spitfire, the beautiful animal ridden by Heloise.

Neither officer spoke, but watched the scouts until the silence became oppressive.

At last Captain Taylor said:

"Well, Cody, what is to be done?"

"I can see but one thing, sir."

"And that is——"

"To go the way they did."

"Which way did they go?"

"They did not retrace their way, sir?"

"No."

"They did not cross to the other shore?"

"Granted."

"They could not go up-stream against this current."

"Not they, Cody."

"Then they went down the river, sir."

"What?"

"They went down the stream, sir."

"You do not mean that they are drowned?"

"I hope not."

"Then what do you mean?"

"That they swam their horses down the river."

"Why, Cody, there is not a spot where they could come ashore within sight."

"No, captain."

"And perhaps not for miles below?"

"I do not know of such a place, sir."

"Then they were drowned."

"We can find out in but one way, sir."

"Well, how is that?"

"On the left bank a man can ride along close to the edge for miles, but not on the right bank, owing to water-washes and timber."

"Well."

"I will unsaddle my horse, sir, take off my weapons and take the river, if you can find a couple more lariats in the command besides Jack's and mine."

"What do you need them for?"

"Well, I would like to tie one end about my waist, and have Jack go along the shore with the other end, so that if my horse should drown and I give out, I can be pulled to the bank, for no man can catch a grip on these steep and slippery sides."

"You are right; but I do not like you to take the risk, Cody."

"We must discover if the young ladies went this way, captain— Ah! there comes Surgeon Powell!"

As Buffalo Bill spoke, a horseman appeared on the hill, coming at a canter toward the ford.

He was in a fatigue uniform, wore a black sombrero with a gold cord encircling it, and a belt of arms, while a rifle hung at his saddlehorn.

His horse was a large roan, and showed his mettle in his small head, arched neck and clean limbs.

The rider was a stern-faced man, with long, waving black hair, and looked just what he was—the resolute soldier, daring plainsman, and one whose nature was cast in a noble mold, whose heart was true as steel to a friend.

"Ah, Frank, what news from the fort?" called out Captain Taylor, as Surgeon Frank rode down to the water's edge.

"No news of the young ladies, Taylor, and I am glad to find you are on their trail," was the answer, and the Surgeon Scout saluted Lieutenant Ames and the two scouts pleasantly.

"Yes, we tracked them this far, and Buffalo Bill is just thinking of undertaking a foolhardy act, I fear, to see what more can be done to trail them," said Captain Taylor.

"I am with you, Bill; but what is the situation?"

In a few words it was made known to him, when Powell said, after a moment of thought:

"If you desire to look for landing-places, Bill, on the banks, you can reach but one side, so I will take the other, for I have a lariat, and our stake-ropes will give us all the line we need."

"I am with you, Cody, for, with you, I feel that they could have gone no other way, and if they went down the river on their horses, then they were prisoners, that is certain."

"Prisoners, surgeon?" asked Emory Ames.

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"That we must find out."

"But there are no other tracks visible than those of their horses."

"Very true, but a moccasin would not make a trail here which we could follow."

"Nor would a boat make any sign," Buffalo Bill added.

"I see that you have both hit upon the same idea, Cody, you and Powell."

"And I do not believe their captors were Indians," Texas Jack remarked.

"No, for redskins would not be dismounted so near the fort," Powell declared.

"Then you believe they are captives?" Captain Taylor asked.

"They most certainly are, Taylor, and from all I can glean of the case the plot has been as clever a one as that by which Miss Heloise was captured before."

"Ah! now I begin to understand you, Powell."

"Yes, it has been a clever plot to kidnap her, and Miss Braddock being with her and the opportunity offering to kidnap Miss Heloise, both were taken."

"I half believe you are right, Powell."

"I know he is right, Captain Taylor, for I had the same idea, as did also Jack," Buffalo Bill responded.

"Well, you scouts are wonders, I admit frankly," the captain laughed with a light laugh, while Buffalo Bill urged:

"Let us lose no time about following. Captain Taylor, may I ask you to divide your force and send them down the river upon either bank, while we will need strong men to hold the life-lines for us?"

The orders were given, and the two daring swimmers threw aside their boots, coats, hats and belts to prepare for the peril before them.

CHAPTER V.

THE DARING SWIMMERS.

The lariats and stake-ropes tied together made two very long lines, and strong ones, too.

One end of each was taken by a soldier on horseback, with a turn around his saddle horn. They then rode to the top of the bank on the left shore.

The force was then divided, twenty men going, under Lieutenant Ames, down the right of the river, and the balance, under Captain Taylor, following the left shore, down.

With the latter Texas Jack went, and the saddles and clothing of the two daring men were carried by a couple of troopers on their horses.

Then, with only the bridles upon their horses, the two men sprang lightly upon their backs and rode them into the swiftly-flowing river.

They lost their footing before they had gotten ten feet from the ford. The sagacious animals seemed to

realize their danger and that their riders were taking desperate odds.

The current was so swift that to stem it would be impossible for horse or man, so that once they had started there was no retracing their way.

A moment more and the two horses were borne along down the surging stream, Buffalo Bill in advance of Surgeon Frank Powell, and the lariats about the waists of the two men leading to the mounted soldiers on the left bank and following them as they swept swiftly down the river.

It was a thrilling sight, and one which the beholders never forgot. Were Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell going to their death down that torrent?

The lariats were long enough to allow the two scouts to sweep across to the other shore, and were drawn almost taut.

The surgeon kept his eyes upon the left bank, watching every break in the wall of rock, while Buffalo Bill eyed the other shore with equal watchfulness.

On they swept, the horses swimming strongly, and, having nothing more to do than to steady themselves in the current, as they rolled along, for they were carried at a speed of over six miles an hour.

Half a mile had been gone over, and twice the river had swung around a bend; but left the bank continued entirely clear of timber, or of any other obstructions in the way of two mounted cavalymen who carried the land end of the lines.

They were cool-headed fellows, too, and watched the scouts with a critical eye, not doing aught to check their progress.

"Ho, Bill, yonder is a break on my side, so move over to the right," cried Powell, who was just the length of his horse in the rear of Cody, but well over toward the right shore.

"I see it, and we can halt there for a rest, as our horses are feeling it," answered Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and it may be more than a resting-place," returned Dr. Powell.

The two men swayed, rather than guided their horses in that direction.

The break in the bank was not through the cliff, but near the water, and the ripple there showed that there was a shoal.

As they neared it both saw that there was a wide, cavern-like crevice in the bank, out of which a stream of water poured into the river.

Their horses soon touched bottom, and, a moment after, stood but knee-deep upon the shoal directly in front of the opening, which, from the opposite shore did not appear like a break in the bank, as the cliff had a bend in it a few feet from the opening.

"I'll push in, Frank, and see where it leads," said Buffalo Bill, freeing himself from the lariat about his waist and giving the end to Surgeon Powell to hold.

The soldiers had halted on the opposite shore, and all were anxiously watching the scouts.

The rock merely arched for a score of feet, not forming a cavern, and through this the scout made his way out into a narrow canyon, down which washed a small stream.

The banks on either side towered thirty feet over his head, and the canyon, or waterway, was not over five feet wide—a mere chasm in the rocks.

Following it, Buffalo Bill, after a walk of an eighth of a mile, came to where it rose abruptly for a few yards and then crossed a well-worn trail.

The party of soldiers under Lieutenant Emory Ames had just gone by, the scout knew, having had to flank the stream that flowed down the ravine.

But there was another trail which seemed to rivet the eyes of the scout, for he stood some time regarding it, then crossed the large track, still following the stream of water.

After a walk of a hundred yards he halted, glanced about him, and, turning abruptly, retraced his way to the river.

"You have made a discovery, Bill?" said the Surgeon Scout. quietly.

"I have found their trail, so we need go no further down the river."

"Good! I am with you!"

Buffalo Bill then hailed Captain Taylor, told him to have the men haul in the lines when they released their end, and retrace their way to the ford and across the river down the shore to meet them, adding that he would overtake Lieutenant Ames and recall him.

Then the two led their horses up the ravine until they came to the trail of the troopers, when, springing upon the back of his own animal, Buffalo Bill said:

"Push on, Doc, and see what you can discover, while I ride after Lieutenant Ames."

"When we get back here, I will come on after you and have Texas Jack follow when he arrives with our saddles, clothes and arms, for I believe we are going to find those young ladies."

"From the tracks we saw on our way up the ravine, Bill, we are on the trail of their horses certainly; but they are in the clutches of clever scoundrels, so we must go carefully to work."

"Yes, their captors are no fools, and yet they can hardly expect that we have found their trail, which never would have been done had you not discovered that break in the cliff."

"But I must be off," and Buffalo Bill dashed away after Lieutenant Ames and his men.

Surgeon Powell followed on up the stream, and here and there his quick eye detected a track which he knew to have been made by the horses ridden by the young women.

The stream led him up into a ridge, along the top of which was a trail, turning to the left, and which had not crossed the little brook.

"There were a dozen horses here, and shod ones, too."

Indians were not the kidnapers of those girls, so it must be that villain Monte Miranda.

"Well, we have the advantage, for he believes he has safely covered up his trail."

The Surgeon Scout retraced his way to where Lieutenant Ames' trail passed the stream.

That officer had just returned, with Buffalo Bill, and soon after Captain Taylor and Texas Jack rode up, the troopers following, a quarter of a mile behind.

"We have found their trail, Captain Taylor, and Dr. Powell will tell you what he has discovered up on the ridge," Buffalo Bill explained, as Taylor rode up.

Surgeon Powell told his story, and then all felt sure that the two girls were in the hands of Overland road agents.

After a short rest they set off up the stream in Indian file, Buffalo Bill leading. Ere long they struck the trail of the kidnapers. Then they pressed rapidly on, hoping to come up with the outlaws before night-fall.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST RESORT.

The trail made by the kidnapers, from where they left the stream, was an easy one to follow, as they had seemed to take no pains to cover it up.

The two men who had so daringly braved the torrent, had seen in the little ravine evidence that a number of horses had been in hiding there.

They followed the trail of these same animals across the main trail down the right bank of the river, which it crossed by keeping on in the water.

A mile beyond this, on the ridge, the kidnapers' trail turned out of the stream and was there plainly revealed, and to the practiced eyes of the bordermen showed that there were nine horsemen in the party.

Two of these horses were those ridden by Heloise and Belle Braddock, for their well-known tracks were often visible among the others.

The kidnapers kept to the ridge in all its windings for a distance of several miles, when the trail turned down a dry canyon toward the river.

To only the most practiced eye was the trail here visible, but the three scouts followed it unerringly.

At last it came upon some broken ground, and soon after ended at a wild and rocky point on the river.

That the kidnapers had entered the river seemed certain, yet where had they landed on the other shore, was the question.

That shore presented no landing-place, for it was high, steep as a wall, and up and down, and as far as the eye could reach, no break was visible in it.

Captain Taylor, Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill searched the other shore carefully with their glasses, but no break in the rocky wall could be discovered.

Then it was decided to camp upon the spot and make a deliberate search of the surroundings.

"You suspect there is some trick in it, Powell?" said Captain Taylor.

"I am sure of it, as is Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack."

"But to discover the trick is the question?"

"Yes, Taylor, that is yet to be done. But how are you off for provisions?"

"I have three days' supplies."

"Good! Then my advice is to camp right here on the trail and let Cody, Jack and myself work out the problem."

"A good idea," assented Captain Taylor.

He gave the necessary orders, and the men were soon in camp.

Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack, with Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Ames, then held a council to see what could be done.

The trail ran to the river bank and there ended.

The river, at that point, was wide, with a broken shore on the side where they were, and a wall of cliffs on the other, so there was no landing-place in view for the horses to get out had they swam across.

On the shore where they were encamped there was a possibility of their following down the stream, though the banks were rough in the extreme.

Still, as Surgeon Powell was a superb swimmer, it was decided that he should take to the river again, with Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack following upon the bank as best they could, on foot.

They were to carry lariats with them, to lend aid to Powell, should he need it, and they could reach him. In case of any discovery, Texas Jack was to give the weird, wild call so well known to his army comrades, and which could be heard a long way off. It was a call peculiar to plantation negroes in the South, in *ante-bellum* days, and when expertly given could be heard even miles away. The brave Texan had caught the weird, wild, pathetic cry to perfection when a boy in "Dixie."

The surgeon then again prepared for his swim, while the two scouts set out on foot as Frank Powell plunged into the stream, the admiration of the officers and their men.

Away he went, with mighty strokes, until he disappeared from the view of the watchers, and, struggling along the rugged shore, hurried the scouts.

Thus an hour passed and another, and darkness came upon the scene.

The soldiers had their suppers and grouped themselves about the camp-fires among the rocks, after the sentinels had been placed around the bivouac.

All seemed impressed with their surroundings, the dark-flowing river rolling by, the sighing of the wind among the pines, and the uncertain fate of the two beautiful girls.

One by one the soldiers dropped away from the camp-fires, rolled themselves in their blankets and sought rest.

But Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Ames still sat

by their camp-fire conversing in subdued, anxious tones.

Where had the scouts gone?

They should have returned long before, the officers thought.

At length the challenge of the sentry down the river-bank rung out sharp and stern:

"Halt! who comes there?"

A response was made which the officer did not catch, and soon after three forms advanced toward them.

They were the surgeon and his scout pards.

"By Jupiter, Powell, but I am glad to see you back, for Ames and I were frightening ourselves with all manner of fears regarding you.

"Sit down! and, Brandy, bring some supper at once," said Captain Taylor, his last words being addressed to his negro servant, who hastened to obey.

"I am glad to get back, Taylor, for I assure you I had a hard struggle for life in that river. I found no landing-place for ten miles, so what has become of those kidnapers?"

"You swam ten miles down that river, Frank?" asked Captain Taylor with admiring amazement.

"Yes, and but for Bill and Jack would not have gotten out then, I fear, for they had to throw me the lariats and haul me up to the bank."

"And there was no sign of where the outlaws could have landed?"

"Not a sign; but we will try it again to-morrow."

And on the morrow they did try; but night came and no discovery had been made, so they were forced to give it up and return to the fort.

Still Buffalo Bill and his scouts, aided by Surgeon Powell, kept up the search for the missing maidens day after day until weeks had gone by.

The cavalry, under Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Ames and other officers, nobly did their duty, too; but all without avail, and at last all could see that poor Major Hembold was breaking down under the great strain, suspense and sorrow he endured.

One night, while seated at mess, Buffalo Bill suddenly sprang to his feet, and his voice rang like a trumpet as he cried:

"I have it! They shall be found!"

All were startled at his vehemence, and Texas Jack asked quickly:

"What's the game now, Bill?"

"Come with me to Surgeon Powell's quarters and you shall know," and Cody led the way to the army home of the Surgeon Scout.

Then the three had a long talk, and, as a result, Buffalo Bill wrote a letter to Mortimer Bainbridge, the Texan ranchero, and the next morning it was sent by special courier to be mailed at a station on the Overland.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW COMMANDANT.

A new commandant had come to Fort Grand, at the same time as Buffalo Bill had been detailed there, and many other changes had taken place along the line of frontier posts.

The gallant Fifth Cavalry had three companies at Fort Grand, having come down from McPherson, and Surgeon Frank Powell had been put on duty at Fort Grand.

There, too, the scouts, under their chief, Buffalo Bill, had been sent, and the post had become the most important one in the line of fortifications.

Two heavy guns, under crews from the —d Heavy Artillery, were mounted upon the fort, and in addition there was a company of light artillery, and a couple of battalions of infantry; so, with the company of Indian scouts under Major Frank North, the army teamsters, the sutlers and the hangers-on, there was a considerable settlement at Fort Grand.

The fort was splendidly-situated upon a heavily-timbered hill, with ample feeding-lands for cattle surrounding, a brook running down the hill, and the river flowing by, half a mile distant.

To surprise it would be impossible, and an army would be unable to carry it by storm.

The headquarters, and the quarters of the officers fronted the parade-ground, over which it looked down into the valley into the river, and far beyond to the mountains.

The river-ford, a quarter of a mile away, was commanded by one of the heavy guns, as also was the valley, while the other gun swept the prairie for miles.

Many of the families of the officers were there, so that, altogether, Fort Grand was a delightful place to dwell, to those who liked life on the far frontier and were indifferent to its dangers.

The new commandant had arrived just after the kidnapping of the two girls, and he was an "unknown quantity" as yet.

A handsome, stern-faced man was Colonel Barrett, and every inch a soldier he had the reputation of being.

A few in Fort Grand had known him before, but to almost all present he was a stranger, save in reputation.

He had quietly assumed command, arriving by stage-coach alone one day, for the Overland trail for the stages ran by the fort, and he had left his escort, horses, servant and baggage to follow leisurely.

Colonel Royston, the late commander, was on sick leave, and Major Hembold was in temporary command.

All were pleased with the calm-faced, dignified commander, but knew that they would find in him a thorough disciplinarian.

The condition of Major Hembold was such that he at once urged him to leave off duty for a while and try to recuperate, and expressed the determination to res-

cue his daughter from her kidnapers, and to punish them to the fullest extent for their crime.

More he did not say until he had been a couple of weeks at Fort Grand. Then he sent for Captain Alfred Taylor and asked almost abruptly:

"May I inquire, Captain Taylor, why the rescue of Miss Hembold and her friend has not been accomplished?"

The question, put as it was, quite startled Captain Taylor, who had been untiring in his efforts to discover and rescue the two girls, so he replied:

"It has been an utter impossibility thus far, Colonel Barrett, to accomplish their rescue, or to discover their hiding-place."

"Pray state the situation to me fully, sir, for, except from rumor, I have heard nothing. Make it, as it were, an official report."

Captain Taylor was glad to see that the new commandant was interested in the case, and made known the situation fully. Then he added:

"There are two persons, Colonel Barrett, whose stories I would like you to hear, for they are fully acquainted with the entire facts."

"Who are they, sir?"

"One is an officer of the army, Surgeon Powell, whose wonderful skill as a frontiersman and his daring have made him famous as the Surgeon Scout."

"I have heard of him, and as a most remarkable man, as fine a scout as he is a surgeon, and one who has had a strange, romantic history."

"Yes, sir, Frank Powell is a very remarkable man, and the peer of Buffalo Bill as a scout, and the latter so regards him, while they are boon pals."

"And the other to whom you referred?"

"Is Buffalo Bill, sir."

"He has been away on a scout since my coming, but returned and reported this morning while I was out; so that I have not met him; but I know of him, also, as a man whose deeds are world-famed."

"These two men, sir, know the whole situation."

"Orderly!"

The orderly instantly appeared, and was given the order:

"Present my compliments to Surgeon Powell and request his presence at my quarters, after which seek Chief of Scouts Cody and say that I desire to see him."

The orderly saluted and departed on his errand, while the colonel gleaned what more he could from Captain Taylor, in regard to happenings on the border.

"I am an utter stranger here, Captain Taylor, almost to every one at Fort Grand, and all is new to me, for I have been stationed in California the past few years; but I am anxious to master the situation and will do all in my power to do so at once."

Just then Surgeon Powell entered and was greeted pleasantly by the colonel, who then turned and shook hands with Buffalo Bill, who came in after Frank

Powell and was introduced to the commandant by Captain Taylor.

"What a superb pair!" muttered the colonel to himself, as he gazed upon the two men before him and bade them be seated.

"I have been having a little talk with Captain Taylor, gentlemen, who has been coaching me in my duties here, in a kindly way. I sent for you at his request, to talk over this unfortunate kidnaping affair of Miss Hembold and her guest, something over two months ago."

"May I ask, Surgeon Powell, for your view of the affair?"

"Certainly, Colonel Bartlett, I will give you my view of the kidnaping in a nutshell, and that is that the Danites are at the bottom of the outrage."

"Ah! the Mormons, then, give you some trouble out here?"

"In a quiet, underhand way, yes, sir, though I do not believe their leaders sanction the acts of those wrongdoers."

"The truth is that the Danites broke up into small bands, some of whom went to mining, others invaded government and Indian land, and a few took to outlawry, when the church nominally dissolved the organization."

"Among the latter was a chief known as a renegade American, and a Mexican, who was formerly an officer of Lanceros."

"The latter knew Miss Hembold, and he it was who must have abducted her."

"To find that man will be to find Miss Hembold, I am quite certain, but Cody has a little private information himself in regard to this affair."

CHAPTER VIII.

BUFFALO BILL EXPLAINS.

Everything in the manner and appearance of Buffalo Bill indicated to Colonel Barrett that he was not the man to waste words, or to talk at random.

"To explain, Colonel Barrett, I must tell you, and those present, some things in confidence."

"Major Hembold, I am aware, married a Mexican lady, when he was stationed upon the Rio Grande. Her father hated Americans, so it was a runaway match, and Mrs. Hembold did not again return to Mexico."

"She died some years after, leaving her daughter to the care of the major. He placed her at boarding school in New York, until her graduation, when she came West to share with him his army life."

"I had heard that she had a Mexican cousin named Monte Miranda and a fortune in Mexico had been left to the pair provided they married. Unless Monte Miranda married Miss Hembold he was not to inherit a cent. I learned this from a friend of mine in Mexico."

"Miranda is chief of the Toll-Takers of the Trails, and I think that Miss Braddock is merely a tool of his

whom he sent here for the purpose of kidnaping Miss Hembold so that he could force her to marry him and thus inherit the money.

"Outlaw that he is, Miranda, who joined the Mormons and is now a Piute chief, knew she would not willingly marry such a villain as he has become," concluded Buffalo Bill.

"I am still on a scout after the Toll-Takers, and was on my way to you to ask for more men to help me when you summoned me."

"And with what result, Mr. Cody?" asked Colonel Barrett, who had listened with deepest interest to Buffalo Bill's strange story.

"I found a letter from him awaiting me, sir, to-day, when I returned from scouting."

"And what does it say?"

"The Man of Mystery will come, sir, but upon strange conditions," responded Buffalo Bill.

The colonel was then shown the letter.

"By Heaven! what a charge he makes!" cried Colonel Barrett, with some show of anger.

"I had not thought of that before, and now I also suspect her, colonel," Frank Powell coolly remarked.

"Who and what is she?" asked the colonel.

"She was a passenger on the Overland from California, sir, and was robbed of her satchel containing her jewels and money.

"Tom Todd, the driver, brought her here to await until she could write home to her friends in the East for funds, and Miss Heloise at once made her her guest."

"Do you know aught about her, Captain Taylor?" asked Colonel Barrett, for the captain had made the above explanation.

"She was a beautiful girl of about twenty, sir, and her name was Belle Braddock, while she said she was the only child of the late Major Braddock of the army."

Colonel Barrett sprang to his feet and crossed the room several times in quick succession.

Then he said quickly:

"Describe her, please, Captain Taylor."

This the captain did, and with a sigh Colonel Barrett resumed his seat.

"Who knows her in the past?" asked the officer.

"Not a soul, sir."

"Who knew her as Miss Braddock?"

"No one, colonel."

"Was Miss Braddock known to any one in the fort?"

"She was not."

The colonel thought a moment, and then asked:

"Did she say she was robbed in the coach?"

"Yes, sir, there is no doubt of that," interposed Captain Taylor, and he told the story of the coach robbery as he had heard it from Tom Todd.

"Who saw her jewels and money?"

"No one, I believe; but her satchel containing them was taken, sir."

"You had her word, then, only for what was lost?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did she write home to her friends after her arrival here?"

"That I do not know, sir."

"What was her behavior?"

"That of a very lovable woman, one who was fond of teasing the officers, a perfect coquette, and who seemed devoted to Miss Hembold."

"She was a fine rider, doubtless?"

"Perfect, sir."

"And a dead shot with revolver and rifle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear her sing?"

"Yes, sir, often, and she sang admirably."

"A contralto voice, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir."

"She sketched a little, too?"

"Yes, colonel, and it seems you have met her."

"I have, Captain Taylor."

"Then Buffalo Bill is wrong in his suspicions regarding her?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, he certainly is right," was the almost solemn reply.

No one questioned the colonel, and yet they saw that he knew more of Belle Braddock than he cared to reveal.

At last he said:

"It is strange I did not hear Miss Braddock's name mentioned before to-day; but, when spoken to of the kidnaping, it was always referred to as Miss Hembold and her friend's capture."

"Perhaps I had better explain still more:

"Major Braddock was my best friend, and when he died he left his daughter to my guardianship.

"She was a beautiful girl, but had been thrown from her horse and suffered from a blow on her head, from which it was hoped she would eventually recover.

"Perhaps she would have done so but for the fact that she had a rival at school—a girl with a beautiful face but the heart of a devil.

"This girl was so like Miss Braddock in appearance that she was constantly doing things for which Belle got the credit and reprimands.

"A young man meeting Miss Braddock, fell in love with her, as she did with him, but this school rival separated them by false reports.

"Then came the accident, and fever followed, which nearly ended fatally.

"The other girl, meanwhile, had become a schemer for wealth, and was a bold, bad woman, and, hating Miss Braddock, in sheer devilry, one day put up in type a notice of her marriage with the young man whom Belle still loved dearly.

"The result of this cruel hoax was that my poor ward became mentally distempered from the shock, and I was forced to place her in an asylum, where she now is.

"What became of her tormentor I never knew until

now, though I heard that she had gone to Salt Lake and had become the bride of a Mormon of rank.

"Now I realize that your unknown friend, Cody, is right, and that she is playing a deep game by impersonating the poor girl she sent to the asylum, and whose unhappy fate was kept a secret from her friends, hoping she would some day recover her reason fully."

"Then you believe, Colonel Barrett, that the girl who pretended to be Miss Belle Braddock, here at the fort, was the one you refer to as your ward's rival?"

"Yes, Surgeon Powell."

"And that she is in league with this Mexican, Monte Miranda, to get possession of Miss Hembold for some deep purpose of their own?"

"It seems so to me, I confess, Surgeon Powell."

"Then Bill is on the right track, sir."

"I deem him so, and all I can do to aid you in the rescue of Miss Hembold I will gladly do."

"If this is the woman I suspect her to be—Cleo Amidon was her name—then I would like to see her captured and made to suffer, for her cruel treatment of an innocent, noble girl."

"And if she is leagued with outlaws, Colonel Barrett, she must suffer the consequences," sternly declared Frank Powell.

After some further conversation upon the subject, it was decided that Buffalo Bill should pick six men from his scouts, with Captain Jack Crawford, a daring young officer, Wild Bill and Texas Jack as his special allies, while Surgeon Frank Powell should go with Captain Alf Taylor, Lieutenant Ames and thirty picked troopers, to patrol the mountains, trails and mines, and be within easy call when needed.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAN'S SACRIFICE.

Along the Overland trail, running between San Francisco and Salt Lake City, a coach was rolling at a rapid gait, for the way was good traveling and a relay of horses had been taken a few miles back.

The driver handled his team well, and was very watchful, for he knew that dangers lurked along the trails, if not for himself, for the passengers he carried.

Within the coach, four passengers, one of whom was, apparently, a young girl, though her face was so heavily veiled as to hide her features; but her form was slender and graceful, her gloved hands small and shapely, and one would guess from her general appearance that she was both youthful and beautiful.

She had seemed a bit nervous on the way, careful to hide her face, and had not been inclined to conversation.

The one who sat by her side was a man whose appearance indicated that he was a lucky winner returning home.

He was dressed in a new suit of broadcloth, slouch hat, and wore a full beard.

All his overtures to enter into conversation with his seat companion and the one who sat opposite to him had been unavailing.

The person facing him was a young man, with black hair and beard, splendid eyes and the air of a gentleman, though a foreigner.

He was well dressed in what appeared to be a fatigue uniform of the Mexican army.

There was a fourth person in the stage in the person of a rough-looking miner.

Suddenly the stage came to a halt as a loud command to halt was heard, and the driver called out from the box:

"Pilgrims, ther road agents has got us, and thar is too many ter fool with yer guns hoping to skeer 'em."

The three men quickly glanced from the coach, while the lady passenger uttered a slight cry of alarm.

"Have no fear, miss, for they will hardly harm or rob a lady," the young man urged, with a slight accent in his speech.

"These devils show no favor, and we are all in for it," the sleek-looking miner remarked.

The third man merely said, gruffly:

"If they kin git any dust out o' my purse it's more'n I kin do."

"Have you much that is valuable with you, miss?" asked the Mexican, politely.

"Yes, all that I have, my jewels and several thousands in money," was the reply.

The well-dressed miner smiled and looked pleased.

"I thought so!" was his mental comment.

The chief of the road agents now rode up to the window of the coach, while two of his men stood guard upon the other side.

"No use, pards. Thar is half a dozen more of 'em," called out the driver.

"Well, you all know what I want—your money or your lives, so let it be what you least value," called out the outlaw chief.

"There is my pile, and I'll keep my life," was the well-dressed miner's response, tossing over a well-filled purse.

"I has got a stake for a game when I reaches camp, and no more, but if yer must have it, thar it be," and the rough-dressed miner handed over ten dollars.

"I want money, not pocket-change."

"Come, sir, what have you got to contribute?"

"A couple of hundreds, sir, besides a bill of exchange which is of no use to you."

"I'll rake the cash."

The Mexican handed it over, and then the chief said:

"Now, miss, you looks like a bird of pretty fine plumage, so what do you pay me?"

"If you rob me, sir, I am utterly destitute, so I beg of you to spare my money."

"Not I, for you can get more, and are doubtless an heiress to a fortune, or are some millionaire's wife, so I guess I'll hold you for a ransom, my lady."

"Say, my man, I am able to pay a ransom, and if you will take me with you and spare the lady, I will readily go."

It was the Mexican who spoke.

"I'll kill you, you know, if you can't get your ransom money."

"So be it; I will take her place."

The road agent looked into the face of the Mexican earnestly for a minute, and then remarked:

"I'll take you on those terms, pard."

"Oh, sir, do not go with him!" cried the lady, and in her excitement she raised her veil, revealing a youthful face, and one of wondrous beauty.

The Mexican glanced at her for an instant, and responded gallantly:

"I accept the situation for your sake, fair lady."

Then he sprang from the coach, and two of the outlaws on foot seized him.

What he said to them was not heard by those in the coach, but one of them instantly left him and called his chief aside, whispering something to him.

The chief returned and looked at the well-dressed miner, while he said:

"You are deceiving me, sir."

"How so?"

"You are Harry Hawk, the 'Frisco detective, and you have plenty more with you— Ha! take that!" and the chief fired full in his face, as the detective attempted to draw a revolver.

With a groan he fell forward, and he was dragged from the stage.

"You see I am in earnest, miss, but as I have a hostage who will pay well for you, I'll permit you to go; while, as for you, I believe you have nothing worth taking," and he looked at the rough-clad miner, who took the situation with the air of one who had nothing to lose but his life.

"Thank you for nothin', pard," was the answer.

"Oh, sir, I will give you my jewelry, yes, and my money, if you will release that gentleman!" pleaded the maiden.

The chief glanced over toward the Mexican, and then said, slowly:

"No, I'll make more out of him; but if he deceives me, he dies.

"Driver, I'll bury Detective Hawk, and you can tell it along the trail how he met his death.

"Go!"

The driver needed no second bidding, and, as the coach rolled out of sight around a bend in the trail, the chief sprang from his horse, and, grasping the hand of his prisoner, cried delightedly:

"Captain Monte, I am delighted to meet you again."

"Yes, and let me tell you that on the body of Detective Hawk you will find five thousand dollars in clean bank notes," was the response of Monte Miranda, for he it was.

CHAPTER X.

ALLIES IN CRIME.

"Well, Captain Monte, it really does my eyes good to see you," said the road agent leader, as, after taking the money from the dead detective, he turned again and greeted Miranda, for Monte Miranda, the "hostage" really was.

"Yes, Rockwell, and the money you get through the tip I gave you of Harry Hawk also is good for your eyes, and more than compensates for the woman's little purse."

"I have an idea that she had a large sum with her, Mr. Monte."

"You are wrong, for she is my ally, though we are traveling as though unknown to each other."

"Ah, I see, sir."

"Yes, and I am eastward-bound, Rockwell, to again get a lot of the old Toll-Takers together, for I have some big paying schemes on hand which I can put through with help."

"You needn't look far, Senor Monte, for I have five of the boys with me, and three others I have picked up on the trails, so we are nine all told, at your service all of us."

"I'll tell you, Rockwell, I have, as I said, some big schemes on hand that will make my men rich with myself, and I do not care to operate in this country, but down upon an old ground, near the border-line of outposts, mines and settlements."

"We can go there, senor."

"I will take command, and you can work your way there with the men, back to the old retreat."

"I'll get a horse from you, pretend to have escaped, and go on after the coach, catching it before it reaches Salt Lake, and you can bury that body and then hunt your retreat with your men."

"But do not remain long, for the killing of Harry Hawk will bring the Vigilantes upon you sure."

"Make your way eastward by roundabout trails, and lose no time in getting away, while you must cover up your tracks fully."

"A good idea, captain, and we will tell the men what you have decided upon."

"All right, but just let me have a thousand of that money you took from Hawk, for I was shadowing him to get it all."

"He was watching the body, and a gentleman back on the trail gave him this money to carry through for him and express East after he got to Salt Lake, so I don't mind letting you have the four thousand and spare change, you know, with his watch and chain."

"All right, Captain Monte," said the outlaw Rockwell, and the sum of one thousand dollars was counted and handed over.

The body of the detective was then buried.

"Men, I have my plans all laid for work, and I will make your pockets heavy with gold, promise you," said

the captain, and soon after, having had another conversation with Rockwell, he mounted the latter's own horse and rode away in pursuit of the stage.

The coach had by this time gained a couple of hours' start, for the driver, Harkaway, had lost no time after leaving the road agents, but pushed his team hard, in spite of the trail he was following.

He had been struck with admiration at the apparent sacrifice of the young Mexican, in offering himself to save the young girl, and was anxious to warn the Mormon Patrol of the Mexican's being taken prisoner, hoping by prompt action he could be rescued.

It would be sunset before he reached the little mountain hamlet where the Mormon Patrol of the Trails had their retreat, but he meant to drive for all his team was worth.

The coach swayed wildly at times, but Harkaway explained to the lady passenger his cause of haste and she made no complaint.

As for the miner on the front seat, he took the situation as coolly as before, except uttering a muttered growl now and then, when a leap of the coach would bring his head in contact with the top.

Mounted upon Rockwell's fleet horse, for the animal was a fine one, very fast and sure-footed, Monte, the Mexican, went three miles to one of the coach, and, after a ride of several hours, halted at a stream for water. Then he heard the distant rumbling of the wheels over the rocky trail.

Just as his horse held his head up after drinking, Monte, the Mexican, heard the stern command from some one unseen:

"Hands up, pard, for you are covered to kill!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRETTY FUGITIVE.

Mexican Monte was too well acquainted with border warfare to take chances when the odds were all against him.

He did not see his foes, for they were thoroughly ambushed, and another voice than the one who had startled him with the command to hold up his hands, told him there were more than one against him.

His horse was knee-deep in the brook, and to dash forward and up the steep hill before him would bring him under the fire of he knew not how many weapons.

To turn about and fly would be equally as bad a proceeding.

So he quietly held his hands over his head, and called out:

"All right, pards, what is the demand upon me?"

Then out from behind the boulders on each side of the trail stepped half a dozen men, and more appeared leading the horses of the party.

"Mormons!" muttered the Mexican, quietly, and then the leader said:

"So we have you, my fine fellow."

"So it appears, pard."

"And you were chasing the coach?"

"Just what I was doing."

"So you are a self-confessed road agent?"

"Who says so?"

"You just admitted it."

"Look here, pard, your head is turned, for I admitted nothing of the kind."

"You said you were chasing the coach?"

"So I was, and I am anxious to overtake it."

"To rob the passengers?"

"You are a fool, for I have just escaped from the Toll-Takers, having been a passenger in the coach, and am hastening to catch up with it."

"This is your story."

"Were you here when the coach passed?"

"No, we got here just after it went by, heard you coming, so sprang to cover and ambushed you."

"Well, come on with me after the coach, and I'll prove my words."

"No, we only give road agents fifteen minutes to live after capturing them, and we will make no exception in your case."

"You are Rockwell, the lieutenant, himself, for we know his horse and Mexican trappings well."

"You are as silly a pack of fools as I ever saw, pards, and I wonder the Prophet allows you to go loose."

"You recognize us, then?"

"Yes, you are Mormons."

"We are the Mormon Minute Men."

"Yes, the Patrol, and I shall report how utterly devoid of reason you are when common sense is in demand."

"You will report it?"

"Yes."

"You won't live to make any report."

The answer of the Mexican to this was to suddenly raise his hands over his head, the palms toward the Mormons, and then, bringing them together, clasp them firmly, while he said in a stern, distinct voice:

"*Nauvoo!*"

The effect was electrical upon the Mormons, for they started, raised their left hands to their foreheads, shielding their eyes and stood in silence.

"Shall I give you the other proof that I am a Danite captain, men?" asked the Mexican, coolly.

"None, chief, we are satisfied," said the one who had before spoken, and he added:

"We humbly crave mercy and forgiveness from you, chief."

"Granted, but be more careful in future not to be over-hasty."

"I was, as I said, a passenger in Harkaway's coach, but held for ransom by the road agents, I escaped and rode hard to overtake the stage."

"Come with me, for Harkaway may be able to give a valuable information about these outlaws."

The Mormon Patrol obeyed, but the Mexican no longer rode at the breakneck pace he had before.

He was anxious to get the patrol well away from Rockwell and his men, giving the latter ample time to escape, for he knew the Mormons were splendid trailers and daring fighters.

At the station settlement they arrived just as Harkaway was preparing to depart, and a cheer broke from the driver's lips as he saw the Mexican appear on Rockwell's horse.

The story of his alleged escape was quickly told, and then he said he would hitch the outlaw's horse behind the coach, to lead, while he rode on.

Then the patrol started on the back trail after the outlaws, but the Mexican knew night would come on before they reached the scene and he felt no anxiety for Rockwell and his men.

The miner left the coach at the station, so that Monte Miranda found himself alone with the beautiful lady passenger.

Her veil was raised now, and she looked very beautiful, as her face was flushed in expressing her gratitude.

The Mexican listened calmly, and then said, as he glanced over some papers he had taken from the body of the dead detective:

"I am more than glad to have served you, Miss Amidon."

The maiden uttered a slight cry and her face paled, while she said, tremulously:

"You know me, then?"

"I wish to tell you that I have served you more than you know, for the man who was killed by the outlaws was Harry Hawk, the detective.

"He had papers with him for the arrest of a young girl by the name of Cleo Amidon, who was a fugitive from California for having most skillfully robbed a jewelry firm by drugging the head clerk who visited her, taking his keys and going by night to the store.

"She secured a snug sum of money and some jewels, but, unable to open the inner combination of the safe, she failed to secure the very large sum she had anticipated.

"The clerk did not betray her, but went to prison as the guilty one, while Hawk took the case from suspicions he formed and was on the right track when, through me, he was killed, and you were not taken back to 'Frisco, my dear Miss Amidon, so can still continue your way and turn Mormon, as was your intention, I believe, from what Hawk's notes here state.

"I alone know your secret, and to prove to you that I will keep it, let me tell you that I am a Mormon Danite.

"I am, in fact, a Danite captain, though my personal duties have called me away of late.

"Now I am going to Salt Lake to renew my allegiance, and by paying my past fees due, with a bonus, I will be reinstated, for what shortcomings I may have been guilty of are not known to the prophet.

"What my plans for the future are, I will eventually confess to you, for you are a woman after my own heart, bold, daring, beautiful and clever.

"I will form a compact with you, and if kept to the letter by you, it will enrich us both.

"Now, my beautiful fugitive from justice, what do you say to becoming the ally for good or evil, life or death, of Mexican Monte, the Danite captain and adventurer?"

The woman had listened to her quietly-told story of herself with a face that revealed her conflicting emotions.

Never before had she been so influenced, and, drawn toward the daring villain by his pretended sacrifice for her sake, she had become, as it were, under a spell.

He knew her as she was, had saved her, and when he asked her to ally herself with him, she held forth her hand without a word and said firmly:

"Until death us do part."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DANITE'S BRIDE.

Whatever argument it was that Monte Miranda used with those in authority in Salt Lake City, as to his wishing to again enter the fold, is not known, but certain it is that it was successful.

Of course, he used deception, and the prophet was won over into allowing him to go upon some secret and special mission, which those who professed to know was not other than to capture the outlaws who hung upon the mountain trails and did inestimable harm to Mormon and Gentile alike.

The secret of his working out this desirable end Mexican Monte kept to himself, but he left Salt Lake City a week after his arrival, and it was with the air of one who had authority.

Nor did he go alone, for he was accompanied by a youth whom he addressed at "Pat," and who was mounted upon a very beautiful snow-white mare.

The Mexican rode the horse which he had ridden away from the scene of the halting of the stage-coach and he was leading two other horses fairly loaded down with packs, so that their progress was slow.

They camped early, and while the Mexican built a fire and looked to the horses, and prepared shelter, Pat took from one of the pack saddles some cooking utensils and provisions and began to prepare supper.

The meal was eaten with considerable relish by the man, while the youth hardly tasted his supper, and at last Monte said:

"What is the matter, Pat?"

"Monte, I will tell you," came vehemently from the youth's lips.

"I shall be glad to hear," the man said, dryly.

"Until I saw you I did not know what it was to love, though, of course, I had had my fancies.

"But I was born poor, so I was accursed, as poverty is a crime.

"I was well educated, and placed at school with rich girls, so was made to feel my poverty all the time.

"Then it was that I vowed I would make my beauty win me riches.

"So I took heart out of the question, and determined to triumph.

"My being poor warped my nature, as well as because I was lowly born, and I hated all aristocrats and people of wealth.

"My father was a Mormon, and my mother ran away from Salt Lake when he died, with only a few thousands to support herself and me on.

"She worked hard for a living and spent the money educating me, and then died suddenly, leaving me almost destitute.

"Then it was I began to plot for riches, and I determined to get them at all costs.

"I could have married a hundred times over, but was determined to wed only a millionaire.

"To go East and win such a husband I played my cards to rob that jewelry store, and, though successfully carried out, it brought me but a few thousands.

"Still, fear of the man who had me in his power, for I confess he was only drugged, where I meant he should die of the poison, for self-preservation is Nature's first law, made me start East with what I had.

"I intended stopping in Salt Lake City to see what I could find there, and so met you.

"Your face won me and I wished to speak with you, but kept silent.

"Then came the road agents, demanding my money, and you offering yourself, and I loved you.

"You told me you were a wicked man, yet I changed not my opinion, and so, led by you, I forgot all my resolves and became your wife.

"Now you tell me that I am to go into the wilds where you are to become the chief of a band of road agents, and blindly have I followed you, obeying your command to dress as a boy.

"You said that it would gain for us vast riches and I came, willing to obey your bidding, but, Monte, just before we halted for our camp to-night, you told me that your purpose was to get into your possession a young and beautiful girl, the daughter of an American army officer, so now I ask you why do you wish to capture this woman, when I am your wife?"

The Mexican laughed lightly, and said:

"You jealous little woman, now I see what ails you.

"But to explain, I will say that in the possession of this girl lies our future fortune, and a large one it is.

"Once we possess it, we can go where we will and enjoy it, Cleopatra, my beautiful wife.

"Do you not understand?"

"Why should your capture of this girl bring your fortune, Monte?"

"I see I will have to tell you the whole story, *caramia*.

"You see she is my first cousin."

"First cousins are dangerous companions, Monte."

"Listen to my story, Cleo, for all perhaps it will be best, after we arrive at the retreat for you to resume your feminine garb, so I'll stop calling you Pat.

"You see the girl's mother was a Mexican, and she ran off and married an American officer, so her father would not give her a *peso*.

"But, that her child should be forced to marry a Mexican, he made his will leaving his large fortune to the girl I refer to on condition that she should become my wife."

"Your wife?" and the woman started.

"Yes, and unless she did wed me neither of us should have a *peso*.

"If I died, or she died, then the survivor would get the inheritance, you see.

"I have tried to win the girl, I admit, since she was at boarding school, but she never liked me."

"How strange."

"But true, though it was not for herself I sought her, but for the money.

"I visited her at the fort, when her father was away, and again sought to win her, but was refused.

"Then I determined to force her to marry me, so kidnaped her.

"She was rescued from me, and I almost gave it up, but at length determined to try again."

"And you expect my aid in this?"

"Of course, for remember, Cleo, you are my wife, and if I can show a certificate of my marriage to her, and another of her death, signed by a man who is a surgeon of the outlaws, and who is practicing medicine in a town on the Overland, that she died, why I can go to Mexico and claim the inheritance.

"To kidnap her you can help me, and unless she is willing to sign this certificate of our marriage, why then she must let me get the fortune in the only other way I can."

"By her death, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I will help you, Monte," was the reply, and the shadow faded from the beautiful face of the woman, whose heart was wicked and cruel.

The next day they continued on their way to the old retreat of the Toll-Takers, and where Monte Miranda expected to find Rockwell and his outlaw band awaiting him.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ODD MINING-CAMP.

It was an odd community that dwelt in the mining-camp, which some facetious miner who had struck it rich had given the name of Glory Hallelujah City.

The element dwelling there, and in the vicinity,

which meant a group of mining-camps in the valley, were as wild as untamed steers, and yet just as easily managed as steers by a master.

They knew their master, too, when he came, and submitted with the good grace of bordermen who knew when to hold up their hands and when to draw trigger.

The mines panned out fairly well, there were several stores well patronized, a few shanties known as "hotels," and one more pretentious building which was called Kate's Kitchen.

This name was given it by the miners on account of its having a landlady instead of a landlord.

The landlord had prospered there, until one day the stage-coach on the Overland, which had Hallelujah City as a terminus on a branch trail, brought to the tavern a supposed youth, who went to the room of the proprietor.

No one knew just what happened there, but a pistol-shot was heard, a fall followed, and the "boy" proved to be a beautiful woman who claimed the landlord as her husband.

He, being dead, could neither deny or affirm the allegation, and Kate Fenwick at once became installed as Landlord Frank Fenwick's successor.

And a good successor she proved to be, for Kate's Kitchen became famous as a place to get a clean bed and a square meal.

There was only one other female in Hallelujah City, and she had arrived there with her husband, Gambler Gray, who kept the "boss" saloon of the camps, which, in honor of his wife, he had named the "Queen of Hearts."

Gambler Gray met more than his match one day and left his memory, his saloon and his fortune to his widow, who was, by a strange coincidence, equally as handsome a woman as was the widow of the late Landlord Fenwick.

Lou Gray soon became known as Gambler Lou, while with the marked courtesy of the miners, both she and Kate were given the title of "Lady" before their Christian appellations, and were spoken of from one end of the valley to the other as "Lady Lou" and "Lady Kate."

There were other strange characters in Hallelujah City, but they were masculine, and the community boasted of Americans, Mexicans, Canadians, Mormons, Indians and half-breeds, with a sprinkling of Irish, German, Chinese and negroes.

Mining, horse-racing, gambling and drinking were the principal pastimes, and the American element made itself most strongly felt.

There were quiet men there and boisterous ones, bravos and desperadoes, and altogether men who lived with their lives in their hands.

The law of the "quickest to draw" was what ruled, and almost daily some poor unfortunate was sent to the burying-ground, in which hardly a man slept his last breath who had not "died with his boots on."

There were a few men in Hallelujah City who "ruled the roost," and were acknowledged "king bees."

Many of the older set of miners often sighed, when seeing these desperadoes putting on airs.

So reckless were the roughs becoming that Gambler Lou and Lady Kate began to hasten their arrangements for taking their departure for more congenial scenes.

They were coining money, so to speak, in Hallelujah City, and had to their credit in Eastern banks snug fortunes; but they were anxious to get more, so that the wolf of poverty would never come near their door.

But they were beginning to feel that the camps were becoming too wild for them, and they were thinking of leaving.

Such was the mining-camp known as Glory Hallelujah City, at the time the Toll-Takers of the Trails were in full swing and the band was rich from their robberies upon the Overland.

It was not particularly startling news to the miners to learn that Keen Kit, the most popular driver of the Overland, had been held up, and his passengers robbed.

They had promptly sent a Vigilante committee out to capture and hang the road agents, and instead of victory met with dire defeat at the hands of the outlaws.

This convinced the miners that it would be best to leave the punishment of the Toll-Takers to government troops, and they did; but the depredations still continued, and one afternoon the coach rolled in with a stranger on the box and holding the reins and Keen Kit seated by his side with his arm in a sling.

The stranger was a most striking-looking individual, and he wrote his name on the hotel books as

"JACK OVERTON—Gentleman."

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGER BARS THE WAY.

Kit Keen, or, as border nomenclature had metamorphosed the name, Keen Kit, was a driver of the Overland whose only foes were road agents and desperadoes.

He would give his last dollar to one in need, and never turned back on friend or foe, while in spite of his big heart and genial nature he would fight anything from a man to a grizzly if there was need for it.

He hated road agents as he did a snake, and was wont to plot and plan to circumvent them and prevent his passengers from being robbed.

Keen Kit also enjoyed the name of Old Owl Eyes, as it was said that he could see in the dark like a cat.

Certainly he did drive the trails when all was as black as ink about him, and he was a man to take big chances.

His team knew him perfectly, and when anything

was wrong ahead on a dark night, the leaders were wont to give him prompt notice.

A number of drivers had been put on the Hallelujah branch of the Overland, but not one had made the success that Keen Kit had as a prince of the reins.

Twice of late Keen Kit had met with misfortune on his run, for the road agents had held him up and gotten a snug sum out of the passengers he carried.

There were too many to fight, for seven men were wont to appear, six on foot and one mounted, and unless it was a coach full of soldiers resistance appeared to be madness and could end but one way.

Keen Kit was, therefore, in no good humor at finding that, after a long respite, the Toll-Takers were again upon the Overland trails.

But on this run, when he is presented to the reader, he was congratulating himself over and over again that he had no "pilgrims" on board, for so he called passengers.

"They'll find the old huss empty and then take it out in cussin' me.

"But I guesses I kin stand it, for I has been swore at that much it do seem ther same ter me as pourin' water on a duck's back.

"Lordy! but how they will profanitize, and won't I be tickled!" and Keen Kit laughed as he drove along with his empty coach.

After a while he resumed:

"I kinder feel it in my bones thet road agints is about this trip.

"Waal, let 'em be, for what hev they ter git out o' me?

"Yer can't squeeze water out o' a dry sponge, and thet same do apply ter me on this run.

"I hain't got dust enough ter chip in fer a liberal game o' poker ter-night when I puts up in Hallelujah City and drops into ther Queen o' Hearts saloon, arter I has had a good feed at Kate's Kitchen."

So did Keen Kit commune aloud with himself as he drove along, and though he knew that the road agents, in sheer deviltry at their disappointment at finding no passengers, might kill him, it did not make him at all nervous.

He was a fearless man, and ready to die at post of duty if need be.

Suddenly the leaders pricked up their ears and one of them gave a low neigh.

Keen Kit had named his horses after his favorite drinks, for the leaders were Gin and Bitters, the next pair Tom and Jerry, and the wheelers Rum and Molasses.

"Ah, there, Bitters, you scent a road agent or grizzly do you—which is it?" he said, as though acknowledging to the horse which had neighed that he thanked him for the signal given him of danger ahead.

Some overhanging branches prevented Kit from getting a good view of the trail ahead, which his horses

could see; but a moment after the driver beheld a man standing in his way.

"I'm in fer it," he muttered, and yet he did not draw rein in the slightest.

"Waal, he are a dandy," he muttered, as he took in the general appearance of the one who barred his way.

He stood as upright as a soldier on parade, and his form was above the medium height, his shoulders very broad, and he looked like a grand, full life-size portrait against the background of the dark green foliage.

The stranger wore a full beard reaching almost to his waist, and his brown hair, a shade darker, fell in waving manes below his square expansive shoulders.

His attire seemed out of place for a man on foot and in a border trail, for he wore white corduroy pants, stuck in high top-boots, a velvet jacket with slashed sleeves fringed with gold buttons, a white silk shirt with broad collar, black scarf in which glittered a small but brilliant ruby star, and an embroidered belt supporting a pair of most serviceable revolvers and a long-bladed, ugly-looking knife for close quarters.

Upon his head was a sombrero of scarlet, which added greatly to his picturesque costume, as well as being very becoming to him.

At his back slung a repeating-rifle of a new pattern, and altogether the handsome, picturesque stranger looked as though he was gotten up for a *masque*, rather than for service on the frontier.

"Waal, I be darned fer a fool, ef I ever see ther beat o' thet gent for a git-up-and-dazzle-my-eyes look.

"A poll-parrot hain't nowhere to him in feathers.

"I guesses he are ther head boss o' ther Toll-Takers.

"But he hain't alone on this trail, so I'll not drive over him, or holler ter skeer him, but let him have his way."

As Kit spoke the stranger raised his right hand.

The driver saw that it held no weapon, but that made no difference to him, as he felt that from an ambush other weapons covered him, so he obeyed the silent command and drew rein with the leaders within a few feet of the man who halted him so quickly.

"Waal, Dandy Pard, was yer out at a picnic last night and ther boys painted yer hat red fer yer?"

The stranger walked quickly to the side of the wheelers, and Kit saw that he wore a very handsome pair of spurs.

"You are Keen Kit," he said, in a deep voice, in which there was a ring as though he was accustomed to command.

"Yes, pard, Keen Kit, Kit Keen, or old Owl Eyes as suits yer best."

"There is no one in your coach?"

"How does yer know that?"

"You admit it?"

"Yas, ther huss is empty, and my puss is empty, so that you has to credit me on toll this run, pard."

"What! you deem me a Toll-Taker?"

"I kinder has a idee yer is."

"Well, you are wrong, for my purpose is to aid you, not rob you."

"Yer don't mean it?"

"I do."

"Whar is yer gerloots?"

"I am alone."

"Hed I know'd thet I'd 'a' treated yer ter a little lead medicine and pushed on over yer."

"I am glad you made no such effort, Keen Kit, for I am your friend and am here to serve you."

"Jist how?"

"Well, there are half a dozen Toll-Takers lying in wait for you down the trail a couple of miles from here."

"You, so they say, have a large sum of money for certain miners who sent dust through by you to get bank bills for it."

"Lordy!"

"I overheard these fellows say that their spy reported the money to be concealed in lanterns, which have a hollow cup under the one for oil——"

"See here, pard, if you expects to git that money without showing up more men yer is mistaken, for no one man kin rob me, and if yer doubts my word jist try it on," and, quick as a flash, Keen Kit had drawn and leveled his revolver at the picturesque stranger.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MUSIC OF A REVOLVER.

At the sudden, and certainly unexpected act of the driver, Keen Kit, in drawing and leveling his revolver, the picturesque-looking stranger showed not the slightest dread, nor did he make any motion to draw his weapon and precipitate a fire.

He smiled pleasantly, and said with no show of anger:

"My friend, you are on the wrong trail, for, as I told you, I am your friend."

"I am wandering about this country in quest of adventure, and I lay in ambush and heard the Toll-Takers plotting to hold up your coach and rob it."

"They had been informed in advance by a spy that you were to bring money enough through, knew the amount and its hiding-place, and more, were well aware that you were alone on the run."

The manner of the speaker was such that Kit lowered his revolver, and, now that he had a good look at his face, he decided that, after all, he might be wrong, so he said:

"What might your name be, dandy pard?"

"It might be almost anything, friend Kit, but I answer to that just now of Jack Overton."

"And your biz?"

"I am struggling with the profession of being a gentleman at-large."

"Waal, yer looks it, and I has ter find out if yer acts it, for many a bad man is disguised as a gentleman."

The stranger laughed and replied:

"Very true, Kit, but let us talk business now, for time is precious."

"Waal, what are your biz with me?"

"The Toll-Takers are awaiting you down the trail, and they think you alone."

"Yas."

"They have all things ready to get your money, and alone you can do nothing."

"I wilts when odds is too heavy, pard."

"Now, I propose to go as a passenger, in the rear boot of your coach."

"I see, said the blind man."

"You halt so as to keep your foes well ahead, and if they look into the stage, they will not into the boot, and when they think all is going their way I will just open on them."

"I'll take the men most dangerous to you at first, while you set your team going for all they are worth, and leave the rest to Jack Overton."

"Pard, you is a gent from 'Wayback, and I are proud ter know yer."

"Jist let me dismount and make yer comfortable back thar in ther boot, fer thar is one trunk yer kin use as a cheer, and ther kiver and straps must be fixed fer opening without no hitch, or you and me will both hand in our chips."

"Pard, yer is a dandy."

Kit sprang from the box as he spoke, and grasped the hand of his new-found friend most warmly.

Then he asked:

"Say, whar is yer horse?"

"He will be around when I want him, never fear."

"You is not alone, then?"

"Yes, all alone."

"Which trail is you followin', may I ask?"

"Can you recommend a good place to me for spendin' a few weeks?"

"I'm the man what kin, pard, for what's the matter with Hallelujah City?"

"I have not heard that anything was the matter with it, though it is said to be a trifle lawless."

"It is all of that, and more, too; but Kate's Kitchen is the best hotel on earth, and that's sayin' a heap."

"It may not hev gold napkin-rings, embroidered tablecloths and all sich, but ther feed are A Number One, and yer'll find it so, while she do hev good beds fer tired folks."

"Kate's Kitchen are ther place, pard."

"Well, I'll go on with you, Kit, if I am not killed by the road agents," and the stranger leaped lightly upon the rack and took a seat upon the trunk in the boot.

Kit arranged the leather coverings, and then, mounting to the box, drove on, muttering his thoughts half aloud as was his wont:

"Now maybe I hev seen him afore and maybe I haven't; but he's a dandy all the same, and ef he hev ther nerve ter carry out his leetle plan, it will be all O. K.

"But I do begin ter fear he hev bit off more than he kin chaw.

"I has my team ter look to, and he will hev a nestful o' snakes ter tackle, fer he said as there was six of 'em lyin' in wait.

"Waal, thar may be more, but I hopes not, fer six are a leetle too numerous fer me.

"Still, it's ther Red Sombrero's funeral and he's ter pervide ther corpse, so I stands in ter share ther expense," and Kit began to carefully watch the trail ahead.

He held his reins well in hand, and his foot on the brake, and a revolver lay by his side on the seat, with his handkerchief over it, ready for quick use.

Soon he drew near the spot the stranger had designated.

It was the very place for an ambush, with heavy boulders upon one side, overhung by a cliff around which the trail wound.

To the left was heavy timber, into which the road agents could dash if they found the force too strong for them.

But all was as quiet there as a May morn, and Kit began to feel that the stranger had mistaken the place, when suddenly a man rode out into the trail ahead of him.

Instantly Kit drew rein, and from either side appeared two men, making five in sight, the last ones being on foot.

They were all dressed in black, wore masks, and were heavily armed.

"Well, Kit, glad ter see you," said the horseman, pleasantly, as he rode toward the coach.

"It's more'n I kin say fer you, Pard Satan," was the response.

"Ah! you flatter me, Kit, for I do not aim to such distinction as being Satan himself, being only one of his imps, by name Mephisto."

"Yer is a liar, fer Major Mephisto got wiped off the 'arth over a year ago."

"I know that well; but I am his ghost—Mephisto's phantom, you see."

"I'd like ter make a phantom of yer, durn yer!"

A laugh was the response, and then came the words:

"Nothing easier, Kit, for you are armed."

"Yas, but I hain't a durned fool if I is heeled.

"Now what does yer want with me?"

"The money you carrv."

"I hain't got a passenger inside, and yer kin see I hain't no one on ther box with me."

"Very true, you are going through empty of pilgrims, Kit; but you carry a good sum of money."

"Now yer is away off thar, for I hasn't enough ter buy p'izen ter kill yer."

"Well, of your own dust perhaps not; but you have hidden away some bank notes in your coach."

"Jest find it, pard, thet's all."

"I will.

"Keep him covered, men, while I get upon the wheel and open the secret box in his new lamps."

As he spoke the masked outlaw stepped upon the wheel and grasped the lamp.

Just then over the rear of the stage came a shot, followed by three others.

The shots were not aimed at the leader, but at his men, and at the first one Kit yelled at his horses and the outlaw captain had to spring for his life, and as it was fell heavily.

Away dashed the coach, and only a couple of scattering shots followed it, for two of the outlaws had fallen under the fire of the stranger, and the other two had been slightly wounded, yet fired upon the flying coach, for their captain was considerably shaken up by his fall.

"I'm hit, pard," called out Kit, as he glanced back at the stranger, who stood in the boot, his rifle now in hand ready in case there were other road agents in hiding who would mount and come in pursuit.

But at Kit's call he leaped lightly upon the coach-top and in an instant was by his side on the box.

CHAPTER XVI.

"GENTLEMAN JACK."

"Pard Stranger, thet were ther sweetest revolver music I hev ever heerd, even if it did git me a leetle out o' tune, fer I are hurted," said Keen Kit as the stranger passenger took a seat by him on the box.

"Nothing serious, I hope, Kit, but we will soon know, when I see if those fellows have force enough to follow us."

"They hain't got over the'r amazement yet, pard, fer yer hit 'em whar they live."

"I killed two, but the swaying of the coach as it started destroyed my aim on the other two, though I nipped them."

"Yas, but yer missed ther king bee."

"I did not fire at him, if you mean the leader."

"Yas, I means him; but, why on 'arth didn't yer nail him?"

"I kept him for another time, Kit, and I feel too kindly toward the hangman to cheat him out of a victim."

"Ah, I see, and yer hopes ter see him ag'in?"

"Yes, we will meet again, Kit; but did you notice anything about his manner of speaking?"

"He were as perlite as a French count."

"Yes, but what else?"

"Pard, he spoke like a man as wasn't born in the United States."

"Yes, that is it, and I am glad you noticed it, though the accent was very slight; but we are not pursued, so

let me look at your wound, and then I will drive for you."

"Can yer handle 'em?"

"Oh, yes, I think so," and, taking the reins, the stranger brought the coach to a standstill.

Then he skillfully set to work to dress the wound of the plucky driver.

"It is in your shoulder, Kit, but I can extract the ball without trouble—there, here it is," and, having drawn a case from his pocket, he took from it a probe and pair of pincers with which he quickly drew out the bullet which was imbedded in the flesh, having just reached the bone.

Hastily dressing the wound and then placing the arm in a sling, said:

"Now I'll drive in for you, Kit, and take your run out and back for you, if you wish, for you must give your arm a week's rest."

"Waal, yer understand handlin' the ribbons, pard, I sees.

"Has yer ever driven ther Overland trails?"

"No, I am an amateur, Kit, but I have had considerable experience in driving."

"I c'ud swear to it, for yer goes ahead ov many a man I knows on the road who are drawin' big pay.

"Maybe yer wants a coach, and ef so I kin fix it fer you?"

"Thank you, no, Kit, I am traveling from a whim of my own, and am in no need of a place of any kind, though I am much obliged to you for your kind offer."

"It's me ter be obleeged, pard, fer yer hes done me an etarnal service, and I are yours ter command."

"Well, I guess we will be good pards, Kit."

"Now I thinks of it, I are sorry I recommended yer ter Hallelujah."

"Why so?"

"It are ther place whar thar is more cussedness to ther square inch than any place I ever seen afore, pard.

"I tell yer thar is killin' thar at ther drop o' a hat; and men as runs ther ranch, now thet ther Bravo in Broadcloth are gone."

"Who was he?"

"As clean a cut piece o' manhood as I ever seen, not onlike yerself in build and ways, only he had a clean-shaved face and looked like a parson, only he wasn't sich."

"A parson?"

"You bet he wasn't, for he c'u'd do more with men than most any folks I ever seen.

"He were the deadest dead shot on ther plains, c'u'd outride a Comanche, and ef Sampson, who yer reads about in ther Bible, had a-tackled him fer strength, he'd 'a' found his match, and I'll sw'ar to it."

"And where is this man now?"

"Ther Lord only knows, pard.

"He come into Hallelujah mysterious like, and he jit out ther same way, and I hes never heerd o' him since.

"Folks did say maybe he were ther chief o' ther Toll-Takers; but ef he were he was a gent clean through, and it did look suspicious, as he went off about ther time ther Toll-Takers gang were wiped out.

"But when he were in Hallelujah City, he run things in great shape, and accordin' ter his idee o' law.

"Ther desperado pards hed ter throw up their hands and squeal, and he were ther king bee o' ther camps, though he never was ther man ter pick a quarrel, though he were in it ter make fur fly when it got ter goin' ag'in' his ideas o' right.

"Pard, I wishes yer hed 'a' know'd him."

"Yes, I am glad to meet a man who is out of the average of men.

"But, how far is it to Hallelujah City now?"

"When we rises the ridge yonder we'll look down inter the valley, and half an hour after will fetch us ter Kate's Kitchen."

The stage rolled on, and the stranger handled the reins in a manner that delighted the driver, who almost forgot his wound in watching his skill in driving, for the trail was a difficult one to pass over.

Soon the valley lay before them, dotted with the mining-camps, and Hallelujah City was pointed out, a cluster of cabins and larger shanties having for a common center a pretentious structure that dwarfed the others as a hen does a brood of chickens.

Then Kit pointed out the hotel known as Kate's Kitchen, and he seemed proud of the opportunity of doing so, and was pleased to see that the stranger appeared duly impressed therewith.

In fine style the coach dashed up to the hotel door, the six horses being brought to a halt as one animal, and the style of the driver at once riveted every eye, while Kit's appearance showed that there had been trouble.

The arrival of the stranger at Kate's Kitchen has already been referred to, but not enlarged upon, and it may not be amiss to here state that Kit introduced his new-found friend with a whoop and a hoop-la.

"Pards, ther man as says I hain't acquainted with ther best man as lives on air, jest lies, thet are all.

"Here he be—Mr. Jack Overton, from nowhar in partikelar and everywhar in ginerar, travelin' fer health and pleasure at his own expense.

"Here are a man, Gentleman Jack, I names him, for he are a man, and a gent, too, and he hev this day saved ther money I were bringing through, hev kept me from tarnin' up my toes, and left some keepsakes back on ther trail fer ther Toll-Takers ter remember him by."

Before Kit could say more one of his enthusiastic admirers, for the driver was a prime favorite and a big man in Hallelujah City, called out:

"Three cheers and a Rocky Mount'in grizzly's growl fer Gentleman Jack, ther stranger in ther red sombrero!"

The cheers were given with a roar, the growl re-

sounded like distant thunder, and Gentleman Jack led the way to the bar of the Queen of Hearts, which was just the proper caper under the circumstances, and was a big thing in his favor for many of those present.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TOLL-TAKERS AT HOME.

The founder of the band of outlaws known as the Toll-Takers had chosen well in his retreats.

The spot was certainly a good one for both a hiding-place and a stronghold.

The valley was a large one, and across one end ran the Overland trail, and so many had been the tragedies there that it had gained the name of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

From where the trail entered it, and left it through a canyon piercing the ridge, the valley narrowed, following a large, swift-flowing stream, first flowing upon one side, then on the other of the vale, and with precipitous and rugged banks, timber and thickets, until only one well acquainted with the intricacies of the trails could find his way through.

Thus it was that the Toll-Takers could drop all pursuers, and, reaching the wild and rugged ridges in the lofty ranges of mountains at the valley and river head, they could laugh at their foes.

The stronghold power of the outlaws was a glen in the mountains, sheltered by a ridge of precipices upon one side, and sloping to the river.

Down this they could command a fine view, and rally against attack, while to flank and attack them from the mountain-side would be next to impossible without a guide, and a work of days to get there even with one.

If driven from this retreat, the Toll-Takers could go on up into the ranges, and, by a rapid retreat, leave their foes far behind, while they sought new fields for their lawless acts.

I refer to the security and inaccessibility of the retreat, to show how hard it was to catch the Toll-Takers napping, and then to follow them after an attack.

The cabins were of logs, with grass roofs, and yet not uncomfortable.

The chief's cabin had two rooms in it, an attempt at furniture, and from what was called by courtesy a piazza in front, a fine view of the camp, the glen, river and further valley could be had.

Back of his cabin was a crevice in a high cliff of rocks, which had been a quick means of escape, if needed, by way of a rope ladder.

Here it was, in this camp, that Monte Miranda joined Rockwell and his men when he arrived.

Already deciding upon his future course, as regarded Cleo Amidon, Monte had hinted to Rockwell that he might bring a lady with him, but whether his wife or a captive, the outlaw lieutenant did not know.

Still he made the best preparation in his power for her comfort, and had the cabin of the former chief in

good condition on the afternoon when the Mexican and the supposed boy rode into the stronghold.

Rockwell had been there for over a week, and had brought with him just eight men, several of whom had been old Toll-Takers under Major Mephisto, Branch Bainbridge, and Monte himself.

They were as hard a lot of cutthroats as ever had been gathered together, and Monte was proud of them when he looked them over.

He told Rockwell that his wife had accompanied him to play the part of boy, decoy or the spirit of the Woman in Black as need arose for her services, and the men so understood her coming, while, as she at once took an interest in their welfare, saw to the fitting up of their cabins with some comfort, they took a fancy to her.

The Mexican had come well supplied with provisions, clothing and all material needed, and in a few days the camp presented a very homelike appearance.

A rope ladder had been made, and hung from the cliff into the crevice, to be a safeguard for escape, and each day and night a mounted man was to be on duty to watch for a foe and to give warning.

Not to attract attention to his retreat, Monte had begun his lawless operations afar off from there, with a few of his men, or had Rockwell hold up a coach, or dash into a mining camp.

He was anxious to let the idea go abroad that the valley was haunted by the ghosts of Major Mephisto and the Woman in Black, who had been the unfortunate Jessie Noland.

To this aim he had shown himself several times to a coachload of people, rigged up to resemble the former outlaw chief, and had Cleo appear on horseback dressed as had been the Woman in Black.

As they dashed by in the dusk of the evening, their horses' hoofs muffled and in silence, the superstitious among the miners and soldiers soon began to dread that there were "ghosts" in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

But the one hope of his life was to get possession of his cousin, Heloise Hembold, and to this end Monte Miranda plotted until at last he hit upon a plan, and with the aid of his beautiful, but sinful wife, determined to carry it out.

So it was that until that fateful afternoon, when, at her request, Cleo Amidon, known at the fort as Belle Braddock, and Heloise had gone for a gallop all alone on the plains.

Several times the good judgment of Heloise had suggested a return, but Belle had urged to go on, until at last they reached the ford of the river.

Then came the sudden act of Belle Braddock, when Heloise wished to return, seizing her bridle-rein and drawing and leveling a revolver at her, with the words:

"I have played my cards well, Heloise Hembold, and you are my prisoner!"

Heloise was startled, then dubious, and she said, with a laugh:

"A true border girl you are, Belle, for that was done as true to life as a road agent could do it."

"And a road agent I am, Heloise Hembold, and you are my prisoner, so no nonsense."

The tone and manner caused Heloise to look earnestly into the face of her false friend.

What she saw there in the flashing eyes, stern-set mouth and pallor, told her that Belle Braddock was in earnest, that she was her foe, not her friend.

But Heloise was blessed with wonderful nerve, and she asked:

"Am I to understand that you have been playing a part, or have you lost your mind, Miss Braddock?"

"I have not lost my mind, and, though I have been playing a part, I am not now, and you are to go with me."

"Whither?"

"To the retreat of the Toll-Takers."

Heloise turned pale, but calmly asked:

"Are you a traitress, then, a decoy of the Toll-Takers of the Trails?"

"Yes."

"And you have played a part to injure me, you have been a snake in the grass, where we deemed you a dove?"

"I am just what you care to call me, Miss Hembold, and I warn you that I played my game to win."

"Having won, I will not allow of any chance of escape on your part."

"You are in the pay of that arch-villain, Monte Miranda?"

"Yes, if you so call him."

Quick as a flash the whip-handle of Heloise fell upon the wrist of Belle Braddock, and the small revolver dropped from her hand.

The lash fell heavily then upon her horse, which gave a mighty bound into the air and attempted to dash away.

But, though suffering from the blow, Belle Braddock held hard with her other hand the bridle rein of Heloise's horse, and, drawing a small derringer from her bosom, she cried:

"Check your horse, or I will kill him!"

The answer of Heloise was to draw her own revolver from the saddle-holster and level it at the head of Belle's horse.

"Unhand my rein or I fire!"

The answer was a laugh, and Heloise pulled trigger. Then came the words:

"The snapping of caps does not kill, fair Heloise, and I took occasion last night to take the loads from your revolver."

"You are in my power, you understand."

Heloise was almost overcome by the alarming position she found herself in, and reeled as though about to fall in a faint from her saddle.

But in an instant she recovered herself to find that the beautiful decoy had thrown the noose of her lariat over her waist and made the other end fast around the horn of her saddle.

"Now, if you attempt to dash away, you will be dragged from your saddle," said the decoy, with a wicked smile at her victim.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER OWN STORY.

"Here come the Toll-Takers now," and she turned to the horsemen as they crossed the ford to where they awaited them.

The party on horseback did not leave the river, but sat upon their horses there.

There were five of them, and they were all dressed in black and wore masks.

The leader rode a splendid black horse, was attired, Heloise at once noticed, as Mephisto had been, and though he was completely masked she felt that she could not be wrong, so she said, quietly:

"Again I am the victim of your cruel persecution, Senor Monte Miranda."

The man started slightly, glanced at the decoy, and responded:

"You know me, then?"

"Who else could thus wrong me, sir?"

"Well, you are my prisoner, my sweet cousin, and it remains with you as to your future."

"You have done your work well, Lady Captain."

"I am glad to have pleased my chief; but I would advise no delay, for you are late in arriving here, and we may be followed."

"Ha! followed? Then you were suspected?"

"Oh, no; but we were both so popular with the young officers, they always follow us when we ride out alone, claiming dread of Indians, and some of them may even now be following us, so I would advise haste."

"You are right."

"Come, Cousin Heloise, I claim your company."

And the Mexican rode alongside of Heloise and made his lariat fast to her horse.

Then he led the way into the ford, and at once turned down the stream with the remark:

"Those who pursue will find a blind trail to follow, Cousin Heloise, and not even your famous scouts Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout Powell can follow me."

"I am not so sure of that, Monte Miranda," Heloise replied.

"Well, we shall see; but be careful now, for your horse has a long swim before him, though do not be frightened."

"I fear death less than I do you, my ignoble cousin," was the plucky rejoinder, and as Heloise spoke her horse began to swim.

Monte Miranda had taken the mask from his face to see the better, and now guided his horse and that of Heloise down the stream and over toward the further shore.

Behind him came Cleo Amidon, her horse swimming easily, and stretched out behind her were the four road agents.

The bold leader guided well, and held his horse firmly on his course.

It was a long and hard swim, though the current swept them rapidly along on their way.

There was one shoal knee-deep, where they halted for a rest for their horses, and after a few minutes again went on.

Bending to the right, they came, after another long swim, to the spot which had been found by Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, and a landing was made.

Up the narrow canyon they went, holding in the little stream, crossing the mountain trail, and thus on up to the top of the ridge, where they turned off to the left.

"Now, cousin mine, you surely will not say that the handsome Surgeon Scout can follow the trail we have left behind us?" said Monte Miranda.

"If he does not, Buffalo Bill will, or both will together."

"Water leaves no trail."

"That depends upon where you enter and leave it."

"Well, how can they find out where we entered it?"

"From the trail at the ford."

"It is a drinking-place for buffalo, bear and deer, so they will track out all hoof-trails before morning."

"Perhaps so."

"Well, granted that they found we took the water there, and I do not believe that they will, how will they discover where we left it?"

"They may go down the river as you did."

"No, not even those dare-devils will do that."

"Well, your trail is open where you left the stream."

"True, but they will see where the mountain trail crossed the stream, and not follow on up to the ridge."

"I do not believe that they will be less skillful in following my trail than they are in trailing an Indian."

"You have firm faith in the scouts of the plains."

"I have had reason to have."

"Well, we will soon take to the river again, and then you will be convinced that your heroes cannot follow us."

Soon after they arrived again at the river, at the point where Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell had given up the trail in despair.

The outlaw chief again rode boldly in, with Heloise by his side, and Cleo and the others following as before.

A swim of a quarter of a mile brought them to a shoal, and here they came to a halt, while the chief pointed to a bend in the river around which was appearing a rudely-constructed flatboat.

Heloise gazed upon it with interest and wonder.

It was some twenty feet in length, but twelve in width, had high sides, and both ends were blunt.

Over the center of the bow passed a rope, which the three men in the boat were hauling upon as it turned once over a windlass.

It came along slowly but surely against the swiftly-flowing stream, a cable being anchored far ahead.

"You did not expect to find a boat navigating these waters, Cousin Heloise?" said Monte, speaking in his half-polite, half-sneering manner.

"I confess that I did not."

"We built it a month ago, and it is no mean piece of work for the frontier, and is perfectly safe."

"The cable is anchored yonder, fifty feet above this shoal in the rocks, so that it will come right here, and these are barriers to pen the horses in, and you will see that we will leave a trail which no one can follow."

"If your ingenious brain ferreted out the means for evil purpose, the ingenious brain of the scouts will ferret it out for good," was the answer.

The boat had now drawn nearer, and half an hour after being discovered, came up alongside the shoal where the group awaited it.

A barrier was then put up around the center of the boat, and a gangway placed over the side.

Without hesitation the horse of the chief walked over it into the boat.

Heloise dismounted upon the side of the flat and her horse was led on.

Cleo Amidon did the same, and the horses of the men were then led on and placed in the barriers and fastened.

With the rope over the stern, as a means of guiding it, the flatboat went swiftly down the river.

Here and there the cable was spliced, but it seemed endless to Heloise, and it was nearly a mile before they came to the end of the rope.

The river here was very wide and formed an eddy over on one shore through which the boat drifted slowly, and the chief said to Heloise:

"We can use our sweeps in coming up here, as we are out of the swift current, until we get a mile below, where we land."

Heloise made no reply and watched their progress slowly.

At last they ran in close to an island, densely overgrown by a thicket of willows, and here the boat was poled into a secure hiding-place.

All mounted then once more, took to the water, and the horses swam the hundred yards to the shore.

"Now, Cousin Heloise, you have seen my blind trail, and I defy mortal man to follow it," said the chief, as they went into camp on the river-bank just as the sun set.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OUTLAW'S ALTERNATIVE.

The Mexican camped for the night on the river-bank without seemingly any dread of scouts or soldiers.

He had his men make a good resting-place for Heloise and Cleo Amidon, and in such a position that the captive could not leave it without passing near some of the outlaws, while the decoy was also expected to guard her well.

The camping-place seemed to have been quite often used before, for there were the three horses of the men who had brought the boat up the river, and the fire still burned.

Provisions and blankets were hidden away among the rocks, and Heloise felt certain that the outlaws had been encamped there for some days, waiting for Cleo Amidon to kidnap her.

But how had she communicated with them she wondered.

Then it came to her that there was hardly a day passed that Cleo had not taken a ride, and no matter with whom she went, she always sought a certain place for wild flowers, and dismounted herself to gather them, and once she had seen her slip something into the hollow of a tree, and now knew that it must have been a receptacle known to Monte Miranda and herself, where letters were left reporting her progress.

"It was a wonderfully well planned and executed plot," she said to herself, as, after eating a hearty supper, she lay upon her blankets thinking over the adventures of the day.

A wicky-up had been built for Cleo and herself, and their resting-place softened by fine straw under their blankets, so that she was by no means uncomfortable.

Early in the morning they were awakened, for Heloise had slept soundly, knowing the impossibility of making her escape then, though she did not give up hope of doing so at some time in the future.

After a good breakfast, at which Monte Miranda made himself very agreeable, they mounted and rode on their way.

Now and then efforts were made to cover up their trails, and then they would resume their way, pressing on at a good pace.

A halt at noon for an hour was made, and then the horses were urged on very rapidly all the afternoon, when the valley came in sight.

Heloise had her own option as to the force of her degenerate cousin, as she had heard it discussed one day by the officers, and Surgeon Powell had said he did not believe there were over a dozen men in the band.

So she said:

"Suppose I told you, Cousin Monte, that you had not a dozen men."

She saw him start, and knew that she had hit pretty near the truth, and, with a laugh, she added, calling him "Cousin Monte," as she usually did, in a tone of sarcasm:

"You see, I know more of you than you think, Cousin Monte.

"Now, Miss Amidon did not have to tell me who was the master of this plot to kidnap me, for I knew that it was none other than Monte Miranda, the Mexican outlaw, though he did not know that any one was

aware of his having taken to the road again as a footpad after his very narrow escape from hanging."

"Don't let your tongue run away with your reason, girl," he said, with anger.

"Why? Because you might strike or kill me?"

"Well, it would not surprise me, and, in truth, I would rather die by your hand than live near you.

"But I think I shall live to one day see you hanged, Cousin Monte."

The Mexican uttered a Spanish oath, but changed the subject.

"Well, you will find I have men enough here to hold you prisoner, and I engaged the services of Miss Amidon especially to entrap you, and now she is to be your fair guardian, so escape is impossible."

"Doubtless; but what is your intention regarding me?"

"You know the terms of your grandfather's will?"

"Perfectly."

"You are aware that, unless you become my wife, neither of us gets a *peso*?"

"Yes."

"If you become my wife, we get conjointly the large fortune?"

"I understand; but I thought you could not go to Mexico, that you were a fugitive from there."

"So I am; but money buys clemency, you know, and I have affairs arranged there so that if I return as the possessor of the large fortune I am heir to, conjointly with you, why, it will be very different from what it would have been if I returned poor, and I will be welcomed with open arms."

"But to get this you must make me your wife?"

"Yes."

"I will never consent, as you know."

"Become my wife, return with me to Mexico as such, get our inheritance, and let me receive my share, and I will release you that very day to return to the United States and get a divorce from me."

"If I refuse?"

"Then you will wish to Heaven you had never been born," was the vehement response of the Mexican.

They were prepared for the event, should they have to face it, and to rescue Heloise Hembold if it was to be done.

They were fitted out to camp for weeks if need be, and the colonel alone knew where to find them by courier when wanted.

Surgeon Powell was also to be the scout of the Boys in Blue, and he alone knew the trails where he could find Buffalo Bill when they needed to communicate with him, or to consolidate with him and his scouts.

The retreat sought by the Boys in Blue was a secluded valley in the mountains.

It was just large enough to support the horses for a few weeks, there was good water, plenty of timber, and around on all sides from the ridge a grand view could be obtained.

There was a goodly number of pack mules in the outfit, so that the men would lack for nothing, and they soon had the camp in excellent shape.

"Nick," the captain's servant, was a fine cook, and the three officers meant to fare well while waiting for a call from Buffalo Bill.

The latter, with his scouts, had struck the Overland trail, and intended patrolling it, and its branches, gradually working down toward Hallelujah City, which Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell looked upon as the hotbed of lawlessness, and where they felt sure a trail might be struck to lead them to the outlaw retreat.

Buffalo Bill moved out in good condition, the pack animals being horses to be used if needed.

He had with him as his right bower Wild Bill, his friend in any emergency, and Texas Jack and Captain Jack Crawford as allies, so that the quartette was a strong one indeed.

Then there were six other scouts, who, like the Boys in Blue under Captain Alfred Taylor, had been picked for their worth, endurance and daring.

The retreat to which the scouts went was all of seventy miles from the military camp, and about sixty miles from the outlaw retreat.

From there to Hallelujah City it was over thirty miles, while the trails could be easily followed by the scouts.

So the camp was established in a quiet nook in the mountains, convenient to the trails, and two troopers with Surgeon Powell returned to the military camp, while three scouts who had gone with the soldiers, to get the locality of such encampment, went to their respective commands.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRAIL.

There was no braver band of men ever left a frontier fort than Captain Alf Taylor, his Lieutenant Ames, Surgeon Powell and thirty troopers.

"I tell you, Bill, I must take a run down into Hallelujah City," Buffalo Bill had said to Wild Bill Hickok, after having been several days in camp.

"Yes, it will be a good idea, and I think you had better send for Surgeon Powell to join us."

"No," said Bill, "I have an especial reason for going alone. I want a close watch kept here, and I want to make an attempt to get Heloise Hembold back on my own hook. I sent a letter to a friend of mine who was a Mormon and who has also been an outlaw. He has promised to help me on this trail, and so I am going to meet him at Hallelujah City."

So Buffalo Bill started off on his ride to Hallelujah City. The friend he was to meet there was none other than Gentleman Jack, the mysterious man who had excited so much curiosity among the miners there.

This man had once been a member of the outlaw band of Toll-Takers of the Trail himself, but had reformed, although, being an honorable man, he had refused to divulge to any one any of the secrets of the outlaws who had once been his comrades.

Buffalo Bill was the only one who knew that he was an outlaw, and had spared him from arrest only on the promise that he would behave himself in the future.

This Gentleman Jack had been a respectable rancher in Texas, and he only came North at the urgent request of Buffalo Bill.

The great scout met him in the tavern in Hallelujah City, and told him the details of the capture of Heloise Hembold.

The ex-outlaw thought for a long time.

"I'll help you, Scout Cody," he said at length. "I'll help you, but you must not ask me to go back on my old comrades. I refuse to divulge their secret retreat even to you, Bill, and I owe you my life, for you might shoot me down at any minute as an outlaw."

"How can you help me, then?" asked the scout.

"I can't help you to run down these Toll-Takers, although I wish you every success and think that you will finally run them out of the country, but I can get that girl away from them and I'll get her. I'll visit the retreat to-night and bring her back in safety to-morrow, but you must first give me your word that I will not be followed and that you will never divulge my part in this work."

"I pledge myself to all of that," said Buffalo Bill in his deep voice.

"Very well," said the Mysterious Man, "meet me in

the road from here to your camp to-morrow morning at three o'clock," and he named a spot on the trail where the scout could meet him.

* * * * *

The ex-outlaw was true to his word. Later that night Heloise Hembold was awakened by him and told to get ready for escape.

She was a plucky girl, and, donning a man's costume similar to that worn by the outlaws, she left the stronghold by the same trail which she had taken.

Those of the outlaws that saw the pair were deceived by the outlaw's voice, for he modulated it so that it seemed in the darkness to be that of the captain, Monte Miranda.

Side by side they walked through the darkness, and at last the girl felt that she was out of the power of the outlaws, and turned to thank her mysterious rescuer.

He placed a hand on her arm. "Thank not me, but Buffalo Bill," said he. "I'll leave you now beside that tree. You will find Buffalo Bill, who will conduct you to safety," and he turned and disappeared in the darkness.

The ovation Buffalo Bill received when he arrived with the kidnaped Heloise Hembold safe and sound can better be imagined than described.

Of course, both he and the girl were questioned as to how she had been rescued.

Buffalo Bill, having given his word, was silent, answering none of the questions, and Heloise Hembold knew nothing about her rescuer. She had heard his voice, it was true, but it had been disguised, she felt sure, and she had not been able to distinguish his features in the darkness.

As to the trail she had gone over, she found herself utterly unable to find it again, and so the mystery remained unexplained until a month later on, when Buffalo Bill made a raid on the Toll-Takers and wiped them out completely.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 83, will contain "Buffalo Bill's Hard Night's Work; or, Captain Coolhand's Kidnaping Plot." One of the wildest and weirdest nights of adventure the scout ever put in.

A negro robber figures in it, and he's a corker. How Captain Coolhand, the highwayman, met his match in a beautiful girl will also be told in this issue.

CURIOUS DREAMS



Everything is "booming."
One would say it was a world of dreams.
You are all dreaming of prizes.
And many of the dreams will be realized.
But wake up to tell us what your dream is.
For particulars and list of prizes, see page 32.

My Dream of the Green Men.

(By A. Kenneth Church, Binghamton, N. Y.)

One night not long ago I dreamed I was out hunting in the woods. It was getting dark and I started for home. On the way I noticed some queer footprints in the soft soil.

I followed these tracks for a distance, when I came to where the trail ended. In front of me there rose a solid wall of rock for about one hundred feet in the air. About three inches from the cliff the trail ended, and I wondered what had become of the person, for he couldn't have scaled the cliff. As I was standing there the rock opened, as if by magic, and I was seized and carried inside.

I was carried down a long and dark passage by my strange captors.

At last it began to grow lighter, and I was taken into a room that was a mile long and a half mile wide. It was lit by a lake of fire in the centre of the room.

By the light of the fire I saw that the skin of my captors was green, their hair as black as night, and their eyes were a bright red, which shone like fire in the dark. I was taken to the side of the room and chained to the rocks.

One of the green men blew a large horn, and from all directions men came trooping by the hundred.

They had the same colored eyes, hair, and skin as the men that captured me.

Some brought snakes, lizards and other reptiles. They skinned the reptiles and broiled them over the coals of a small fire, which they used for cooking.

They unchained me and placed before me dishes of the broiled reptiles. At first I couldn't stand it to eat the snakes. At last, driven by hunger, I cleaned the dishes. The snakes were very excellent eating.

That night they had a great feast. They sat down to a very large table, which had a gold top.

They numbered in all about six hundred men and a number of women and children. The chief, or king, sat in the center of the table, on a chair of pure gold.

Three of the men opened a door in the side of the cave and brought a dozen men, who were prisoners like myself. Their heads were cut off and they were cut up and boiled. A piece of the boiled victims was given to each person, who devoured it with great relish.

The next night they had another feast, and I was led forth to be killed and eaten. I got down on my knees and laid my head on the executioner's block, who cut my head off.

I was cut up and boiled, and a piece of my body was given to each cannibal, who devoured it with as great relish as they had the others.

Then I awoke.

A Robber Dream.

(By Thomas Berger, Hyde Park, Mass.)

It was a cold December night and it was snowing very hard. I went to bed very late, it was about twelve o'clock. I was just after hearing of some desperate robbery, and I was feeling very much afraid. I was sitting near my bed watching the snow, when my attention was drawn to a light which shone through the keyhole of the back door.

I saw a man with a false beard on his face, for it did not stick very well. He wore a large black mask, concealing his face as far as his nose. I had never seen him before. He had two revolvers in his pocket, and in his hand he carried a light which shone very small. He looked like those robbers I had read about. I was frightened,

but did not show it, and watched him eagerly to see what he would do.

He took a bundle of keys from his pocket and fitted some to the lock, but the key was on the inside and he had to break the lock.

He did so and went upstairs, plundering as he came. He did not see me right away and went along. I did not know what to do, and so kept very quiet. He went in all the rooms and looked around. I saw him take my watch and put it in a bag he carried.

He then came to get some rings, which he saw on a shelf near me, and when he came near me I made him stumble by shoving my leg out.

He looked very surprised, and said he would blow my brains out if I did not keep quiet. I said I would not and he went away to the next room, and I began to yell, but he fired and hit me on the arm. I felt a sting, and he ran away, leaving me wounded. I woke up and found it was morning. This was my dream, and I was glad it was a dream.

A Dangerous Dream.

(By Wallace Davidson, Indianapolis, Ind.)

One night, about two years ago, when I lived in Ohio, I lay down upon my bed and began reading, a Tip Top I believe it was, and I fell asleep and began dreaming. I dreamed that I was out hunting, and that all of a sudden a band of Indians came up and took me prisoner. I thought they took me a great way off, and at last came to their camp. Then they bound me to a tree and piled wood around it. Then they set it afire. I could feel the heat and the smoke choked me, when swish! punk! and down I fell into a blanket held by firemen. I had in some way upset my lamp and set the house on fire. A fireman saved me and threw me down into the blanket just in time. For two weeks after that I could hardly sleep at all.

An Adventurous Journey.

(By Barnett W. Macy, Orlando, Fla.)

I went out on a camp the other day, and I was sitting with a big crowd of boys that were with me. We were all reading Buffalo Bill stories, when I got tired and I fell asleep. I dreamed that I was out in a small boat and the wind was blowing hard. The water splashed into the boat and we had nothing with which to bail the water out, and it kept on filling until it filled up and sank. We could all swim fairly well. While I was about halfway to shore, I happened to look back and I saw seven alligators after us, and I got so scared I could hardly swim. They kept on coming nearer and nearer, until they were up with us. One of them caught hold of Billy's leg and carried him under and that was the last we ever saw of him. We reached the shore in about five minutes. After we had stood there under a big oak tree to get rested we started back to the camp, but we lost our way. We wandered about until we found a road. We followed it for about five miles, and then we happened to find a cross road, so we took that road. We had not gone a quarter of a mile when we ran into a lot of rattlesnakes, but they

did not hurt us. We kept on until we met a man in a wagon coming toward us. When it came up we asked him if we were on the right road to Big Oak. He said, in a low, grumbling tone:

"Naw, sonny, you is six miles from the right road. Jump into the wagon."

He carried us to the right road, and said:

"This is the way I have to go."

We were at the right road now. He left us, and we went on our way. After a while we came to a railroad track. We went down it and found a little shanty for a depot, with the name Pegs Villa on it. We rested there a few minutes and then went on. After a while we found a road with a sign—to Big Oak—nailed to a tree. We then knew we were on the right road, so we kept on. We got so tired that we sat down under a tree to rest again. The sun was just going down, so we did not stay there long. We left on a run. Our clothes were dry now. We kept on until all of a sudden three bears got after us, and all of us took to our heels. They kept after us for about two miles. It was dark now and it was hard for us to keep the road. Jim Brown and Harper Black got a pine knot and lighted it, so we could see. We kept on, when all of a sudden, three men jumped out of the bushes, and said:

"Hands up!"

They took everything we had, and then said:

"You can go."

The next thing I knew Sam woke me up, and I had not been anywhere.

A Battle in My Sleep.

(By Earl R. Foley, Catlin, Ill.)

I had a fight this morning, and, being bruised up, I went to bed early. I had been asleep about four or five hours when I thought I was fighting and I commenced pounding my little brother, who was sleeping with me. He awoke and called mamma, and then she woke me. I thought I was fighting Cash Frazier, a boy whom I had fought that morning. The next morning when I got up and looked at my little brother's face I saw that it was all swollen. After breakfast my father gave me a whipping for fighting, and you can bet that I do not want to have any more fights, for I do not like to get whipped.

A Dream of the Woods.

(By William T. Conway, Philadelphia, Pa.)

One night in December, a few nights before Christmas, I had a fierce dream. I dreamed that another boy and I went out deer hunting. We had just reached the woods when the boy whom I was with commenced to feel very tired. So I said it would not be a bad idea if we lay down for a while, and he agreed to my plan. We were lying on the grass, when we were awakened by a deer. I woke first and then woke my friend; we both loaded our guns and fired at the deer. The deer was laying stiff on the ground in about thirty seconds. Then I said to my friend:

"Shall we take him home?"

My friend said, in a glad shout:

"Yes, Billy."

So we gathered the deer up and took him to a furrier, and he said to take the skin from the deer would cost about three dollars. We were amazed at such a price. But we paid for it, and took it to another furrier and we asked him how much he would give for it. He said:

"Boys, I will give you five dollars for the skin."

We took the offer and were having a good time when a policeman came to us and asked us where we got all the money. We told him, but he would not believe us, and arrested both of us. As that happened I awoke from my slumber, and my mother came to me and said:

"Willie, it is time to go to work now."

I was so glad that the dream was not true.

A Bank Robbery.

(By Herman Meier, Kenosha, Wis.)

October 13, 1902, was a very cold day, and I went to bed and went to sleep. I dreamed that I was taking money to the bank. When I got to the bank door I was struck a fearful blow on the head and all was black. Gradually I recovered my senses and found myself in a dark cellar with a man standing over me. I asked him where I was, and he said it was none of my business. He gave me a drink of water. I asked him for my money, and he said that I could have it back if I helped to rob the bank. I said, "No, I will not." But they took hold of me and carried me into the basement of an old house, and there they threatened to kill me if I did not help them. They told me to go to the little cellar window and open the door in front. When I got in the bank I yelled, "Murder! Police! Help!" and I was awakened with a start.

A Sure Enough Dream.

(By Wendell Taylor, Indianapolis, Ind.)

One time when I and my chum, Ted Davidson, were out hunting, I fell into a creek—that was by our camp and got wet. I went to the fire and lay down before it to dry my clothing and fell asleep. I dreamed that I had fallen into a nest of rattlesnakes and could hear them hiss and rattle, but could not move. I thought a large one drew back its head and coiled, ready to spring. At that moment I heard the report of a rifle and awakened. I saw a huge rattler writhing on the ground and my pard with a smoking rifle in his hands.

Ted had come up just as the snake had coiled, and had shot it dead.

I had enough camping for once.

A Long Trip for a Birmingham Boy.

(By W. A. Jackson, Adamsville, Ala.)

In the month of June, 1902, I received from my uncle, who was in Fresno, Cal., and whom I had not seen for several years, money to pay my expenses there. Of course I was anxious to take the trip. It was on a Wednesday I received the money, and on the following Saturday I took the train with my ticket reading Frisco System, Kansas City, via Santa Fe, to Fresno, Cal. In crossing

the Mississippi River at Memphis I met with my first adventure. While crossing the Mississippi River at night a man, who had been drinking, ran against me and pushed me from the car; while falling I caught hold of the platform and it was some time before I could get back on the car. While hanging there a thought came to me that I was lost, but I succeeded in getting back with a few bruises. Sunday, at noon, I arrived in Kansas City, staying there until 2.35 P. M. I then took the Santa Fé for Fresno, arriving in that city on Wednesday the following week. I soon found my uncle, and we took in the city. I soon knew the city as well as if I had been born there. At the end of three months I decided to return home to Birmingham, Ala., so I bade my uncle good-by, and, with thirty-five dollars in my pocket started to make a trip of about three thousand miles. I took the Sp. train; got to New Orleans on Thursday. I was dead broke, but I had a lot of courage, so I went over on the L. & N., caught a freight train and rode into Montgomery, where I got something to eat, and it tasted good, for I had not eaten anything for a day and a night. After a good square meal I again caught a freight, but was almost knocked senseless trying to get on. I got on all the same and rode into Birmingham. Then I walked out home, a little station called Adamsville. This is only a dream.

My Adventure With a Mad Dog.

(By Harold Ogilvie, Raton, New Mexico.)

One night in Indiana, where I used to live, I was playing till way after dark, and when I went to bed I was tired out. Pretty soon I got up and went out in front of the house, and was looking at a story book with my brother and my mother, when all of a sudden I heard a yell. I looked up, to see a mad dog coming down the street as fast as he could run. He went down about five hundred yards south of our house, circled around, and came back and ran straight for me. I was so frightened I couldn't move. He came up and jumped on my back and bit me twice. I yelled, "Oh, my back. Where is my mad dog stone?" I then woke up. It was all over and my mother came rushing into the room and asked me what was the matter.

A Burglary.

(By Francis De Bingo, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

'Twas midnight, the rain was falling fast. I dreamed that I sneaked along one of the principal avenues of New York City. The sidewalks were slippery from the rain. I walked up the avenue glancing from side to side. All at once I came to a large apartment house; 'twas in darkness, except for the few lights in the hall. I entered the portal, and, softly trying the door, found it opened to my touch. I entered and softly crept up the stairs. I mounted to the fifth story. Everything was as still as the grave. A window in the hallway looked out onto an airshaft, as did also the windows of the apartments. I raised the hall window, stood out on the ledge and stepped over to the sill of the apartment window. Raising the sash softly I entered. I found myself in a hallway. I listened; a man's snores greeted my ears. And the ticking of the clock

sounded like the beat of a church bell. I entered a room, and, in the darkness, could just see the outlines of a bed and forms huddled up in the clothes. I went to a dresser and took what money and jewelry there were there. This I did in the rest of the sleeping rooms. Then I thought it was time to go. As I came down the hallway to reach the open window, I came upon a hat rack, on which a coat was hanging. I put the coat on and found it was just my fit. I stepped out on the window ledge, and as I put my foot over to reach the other ledge, my foot slipped and I tumbled down the airshaft. I could feel myself going down, down. Instinct made me throw my hands out; they grasped at space, and then closed around something cold like iron. There was a crash. I had struck the bottom of the shaft. I awoke to find myself shaking like a leaf, and all tangled up in my bicycle, that was standing in my own hallway at home. I managed to break away from my wheel to find that in my sleep I had got out of bed, put my overcoat over my pajamas, and tried to get out the front door.

The governor, hearing the noise, woke up. He came out, and, taking me by the ear, chased me off to bed. What puzzles me is, How far would I have gone in my sleep, and what would I have done?

In an Indian Camp.

(By William Bautsch, Pottsville, Pa.)

One night after I had read one of Buffalo Bill's books I went to bed and dreamed that I was going out for chestnuts. When I got out in the woods pretty far I saw a bear, and was just going to run when the bear skin fell to the ground, and I was caught by an Indian. He took me to his camp and kept me there for a week, and then they decided to shoot me, so when the Indian aimed his rifle and fired I awoke, lying on the floor. I had fallen out of bed.

How I Escaped.

(By Ernest W. Bastian, Hornellsville, N. Y.)

I dreamed that I was out gathering nuts, when all at once, without a bit of warning, came the words:

"Hands up!"

Up went my hands like a shot. Then a large fellow, all dressed up like an Indian, came up to me with a gun ready to shoot if I moved, and then he told one of the men, who were back in the bushes nearby, to tie up my hands and he did it, and so well that I couldn't get them loose.

Then the fellow, who seemed to be the leader, said:

"Take this dog away to the cave, and don't let him get away. There is money in this deal."

We went off. Once I tried to get behind a tree, but he raised his gun to shoot, and I got back mighty quick, I can tell you.

When we got to the cave there were three other men there, and they greeted us by saying:

"Here is another one to pull up, is it."

I nearly fainted away. After a while they gave me some supper, and then the leader gave me a cuff across my face that knocked me to the ground. When I got up I drew a knife and started for him. I stabbed him in the

side. Then there came a bang! bang! and I felt a bullet in my shoulder. I gave a yell and started for the fellow that fired the shot and killed him, then they all started for me, and though I fought hard, they caught me and bound me. Then the leader said:

"Hang him, the dog!"

They put a rope around my neck, and he gave the order to pull, but there was a boom like a cannon that raised us off our feet. Then just before I struck the ground again I woke up with a start and looked all around, but could see no one but my sister, who had been trying to wake me up.

A Curious Dream.

(By Willis Butler, Shreveport, La.)

One summer, when I was in Hot Springs, I dreamed that I went to an opera and sat across the aisle from a girl, who kept looking at me as if she knew me, and I thought I knew her; so when the opera was over she asked me to go home with her and I said, certainly. So we got in a carriage, which was waiting, and drove off. When we got to her home it was late, and I said I would go, but she said for me to come in. I went in and sat down, and we began talking. After a while she asked me if I didn't want a cup of coffee, and I said yes. She went out and I waited for an hour or more, but she didn't come back. After a while I heard slow footsteps coming and an old man came to the door, and said:

"Young man, what are you doing in my house this time of night?"

I told him that I came home with his daughter, and he said, "That's too slim," and hit at me with his walking stick. Then he hit again and I jumped back and bumped my head on the headboard and woke up.

A Terrible Fall.

(By James Egan, New York City.)

Three years ago this winter there was a fire near my home, which lasted for four days. It happened in a lumber yard; and my friends and I watched it until past midnight.

Being tired when I got home, I threw myself in bed and was soon fast asleep. I am a fireman. It is a cold winter's night. Ding! dong! Fire in the lumber yard. Our engine is the first on the scene. Up I go to the top of a lumber pile. My heart seemed to stand still, for there facing me with a knife in his hand is a man whom I recognized as a fiendish cutthroat. Horrors of horrors! I could not utter as much as an appeal for help. Gradually he pushed me toward the edge of the pile. I received a lurch that sent me sprawling some forty feet below into the icy water of the river. Imagine my surprise when I received a smack on the back and was told to get dressed for school. My teacher saw me shivering as if I had the ague and advised me to go home. And you can bet that I am thankful that it was no worse than a dream.

 \$1 worth of Trunks & M'ke-ups, sent postpaid for 25 cents stamps or 5c stamps, 10c stamps, 15c stamps, 20c stamps, 25c stamps, 30c stamps, 35c stamps, 40c stamps, 45c stamps, 50c stamps, 55c stamps, 60c stamps, 65c stamps, 70c stamps, 75c stamps, 80c stamps, 85c stamps, 90c stamps, 95c stamps, 1.00 stamps, 1.05 stamps, 1.10 stamps, 1.15 stamps, 1.20 stamps, 1.25 stamps, 1.30 stamps, 1.35 stamps, 1.40 stamps, 1.45 stamps, 1.50 stamps, 1.55 stamps, 1.60 stamps, 1.65 stamps, 1.70 stamps, 1.75 stamps, 1.80 stamps, 1.85 stamps, 1.90 stamps, 1.95 stamps, 2.00 stamps, 2.05 stamps, 2.10 stamps, 2.15 stamps, 2.20 stamps, 2.25 stamps, 2.30 stamps, 2.35 stamps, 2.40 stamps, 2.45 stamps, 2.50 stamps, 2.55 stamps, 2.60 stamps, 2.65 stamps, 2.70 stamps, 2.75 stamps, 2.80 stamps, 2.85 stamps, 2.90 stamps, 2.95 stamps, 3.00 stamps, 3.05 stamps, 3.10 stamps, 3.15 stamps, 3.20 stamps, 3.25 stamps, 3.30 stamps, 3.35 stamps, 3.40 stamps, 3.45 stamps, 3.50 stamps, 3.55 stamps, 3.60 stamps, 3.65 stamps, 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